

## Warning Concerning Copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials.

Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

University of Nevada, Reno

**Sending out Your Soul:**  
**An Entheogenic Forum Community Explored through Language**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:  
Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and the University of Nevada Honors Program

By: Erin E. Frias

Dr. Marybeth Eleanor Nevins, Thesis Advisor

Dr. Louis Forline, Thesis Advisor

May 2011

**University of Nevada, Reno  
The Honors Program**

We recommend that the thesis  
prepared under our supervision by

**Erin E. Frias**

Entitled

**Sending out Your Soul:**

**An entheogenic forum community explored through language**

Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**BACHELOR OF ARTS, ANTHROPOLOGY**

**X**

---

M. Eleanor Nevins Ph.D.  
Thesis Advisor

**X**

---

Louis Forline Ph.D.  
Thesis Advisor

**X**

---

Tamara Valentine Ph.D.  
Director, Honors Program



## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the discourse of an online forum community centered on an entheogenic medicine called ayahuasca. Ayahuasca is an indigenous brew made out of two hallucinogenic plants used by shaman of the upper Amazon regions of South America to send their souls to the supernatural world. The purpose of taking ayahuasca is to receive guidance and knowledge from ancestral and plant spirits in order to heal mental and physical illnesses.

Globalization and the World Wide Web have contributed to the spread of ayahuasca to mainstream society where spiritual discourse and alternative medicinal practices are re-contextualized to fit within the domain of contemporary ayahuasca use. I will analyze three ways the ayahuasca.com forum community has re-contextualized ayahuasca through language. The first discursive strategy is the use of alternative words in place of common words used by mainstream society to characterize psychedelic drugs and the people who use them. The formation of the forum register creates a new meaning for ayahuasca and the experience that disassociates them from the discourse associated with recreational drug users; secondly, the use of spiritual discourse, which further separates the forum members from recreational drug users, in order to build a foundation that justifies their use of an illegal substance under the auspices of freedom of religion in the United States; thirdly, the discourse surrounding modern ailments, modern medicine and motivations for participating in an alternative form of healing are understood as the growing disenchantment of Western medicinal practices like long term drug treatments that focus on symptoms rather than internal or psychological causes.

*Keywords:* ayahuasca, alternative medicine, virtual community

## Acknowledgement

I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who took the time to show a nascent anthropologist the intricacies of researching and writing ethnography. Namely Dr. Marybeth Eleanor Nevins and Dr. Louis Forline, my mentors and role models, who not only have to put up with me in class, but also had to calm me down when my level of sanity was questionable. I consider myself lucky being able to study under them. And to the UNR Honors Program, whose guidance has been phenomenal. I would also like to acknowledge the members of the ayahuasca.com forums, to whom I am eternally grateful. Without their extensive knowledge, patience, sense of humor and understanding this thesis would not have been possible. I feel truly blessed to have had such a wonderful group of people as my first study community. I have also been lucky to have a knowledgeable and patient “soul surfer” to help me understand the fears and motivations associated with ayahuasca...I hope you find what you are searching for Kimo! I would like to acknowledge my entire family and the support they have extended. They unfortunately have to put up with much more than my college professors. And last but certainly not least, the unwavering support of my husband Brian and daughter Bailey who have helped me achieve more than I thought was possible. I dedicate this thesis to them, team Frias. Thank you.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgement .....	ii
Introduction .....	1
Research of a Forum Community .....	4
Literature Review .....	5
What is Ayahuasca? .....	9
Discovery and Dissemination .....	14
Ayahuasca and the Law .....	28
The Researcher and the Research .....	33
Forum Communication .....	39
Ayahuasca.com Forum .....	52
Data Analysis .....	69
Word Substitution .....	70
Language of Spirit .....	80
My Cousins Monkey .....	82
Contemporary Ailments and Indigenous Cures .....	88
Medicinal Discourse, Religion and United States Law .....	94
Discussion .....	98
Conclusion .....	102
Glossary .....	104
References .....	108
Appendix – Questionnaire .....	115

Footnote – due to the personal nature of the forum entries used in this thesis the usernames have been changed to nondescript names.

## Introduction

I have titled this thesis “Sending out Your Soul” because I interpret the title as having two meanings that exemplify the ayahuasca.com forum member. It can be interpreted as the physical journey the soul takes into the supernatural world during the ecstatic experience of ayahuasca. Or “sending out your soul” can be interpreted as what a person does when they become an active member of a forum community, by relating their experiences through written discourse. This thesis is the study of the written media of the ayahuasca.com forums, whose use of language re-contextualizes ayahuasca use away from its association with psychedelic drugs and recasts it as entheogenic medicine.

The term entheogen, often referred to as “teacher plant,” is defined as “generating the divine within,” (Dictionary.com, 2010) which, for the person using the term, changes the meaning of a psychedelic *trip* into a spiritual experience. The deliberate use of the term entheogen on the forum, separates the ayahuasca visions from the hallucinogenic or “delusional visions” (Dictionary.com, 2010) that are generated by/associated with psychedelic substances that are used for recreational purposes. It should be stated here that most substances used in recreational psychedelic experiences are the same substances used in entheogenic experiences. However, an entheogen differs in how it is prepared, the way it is used, the reasons for its use, and the resulting experience.

In the last decade ayahuasca has been introduced to mainstream societies in three different ways; first, through the spread of Brazilian syncretic churches, the Santo Daime (Cefluris, 2000) and União do Vegetal (UDV, 2010) (to be known as the UDV here on after) churches established in the 1930s and 1960s, respectively, who use ayahuasca as a



sacrament; second, through tourism specifically designed for adventurers seeking an alternative consciousness and spiritual enlightenment during their travels to South America in what are called ayahuasca retreats (Stuart, 2002); and third, through the spread of discourse through online media and brew-it-yourself websites that provide the raw materials for solitary use or group use outside of the retreat and syncretic church environments (Forum, 1999-2010). The population makeup of the ayahuasca.com forums is a blend of all three identities that celebrate the flow of ideas and discourse on the subject of ayahuasca as a spiritual medicine.

The methods employed by forum members to create an entheogenic experience are adapted from contemporary indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca ceremonies prevalent in the upper Amazon regions of Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil and Bolivia. In many instances the Brazilian syncretic religions have been instrumental in contributing to the domain of mainstream use by enabling ayahuasca drinkers to speak freely on the public forum about what would otherwise be defined as illicit drug use. Successful legal battles for religious freedom in countries with heavy drug restrictions have opened up the possibilities of legal entheogenic use for individuals.

New media have, by far, been the strongest influence on the re-contextualization of ayahuasca in mainstream United States society. Anthropologist Debra Spitulnik (1993) has stated that the power of mass media can “shape [the audience’s] existence and participation within a given society” (p. 294) In effect, the discourse circulated through the forum does just that. It serves to instruct the ayahuasca initiate in the correct way to spiritually prepare and ingest the brew, insights on how to interpret the

visions/experiences and how to *talk* about ayahuasca by casting it within a spiritual context on the forum. Deborah Cameron (2001) has explained that written discourse “is not a direct representation of speech so much as a model of language” (p. 33) Cameron further explains that “this model exerts a strong influence on our perceptions of what language is, or ought to be like” (p. 33) By directing the language of the forum to only include respectful and spiritual ways of talking about ayahuasca the forum has, in essence, shown the world what ayahuasca means to them and model how they hope it should be interpreted by mainstream society.

I have examined three discourse strategies utilized by ayahuasca.com forum members to create and reinforce a community identity that is circulated and re-circulated through media communication. First, I will explore how forum members have replaced and fought against the use of stigmatized words connected to illicit drug use, for words that have “less associated baggage” (Forum, 1999-2010). Terms like “hallucination,” “psychedelic trip,” or “drug” that have significance within the recreational drug community are changed to “vision,” “dream,” and “medicine” respectively. Next, I will analyze how forum members infuse the ayahuasca experience with what I am terming “spiritual discourse” to demonstrate to forum readers that their use of ayahuasca falls under the auspices of freedom of religion. Since investigating the laws that are relevant to ayahuasca, in each country, on every continent, would be a difficult task at this time, I will concentrate my findings on how the laws pertain to legal interpretations of religious freedoms within the United States. And last, I will examine how forum members discuss ayahuasca as a healing medicine in their attempts to align their views within their

interpretation of contemporary indigenous and mestizo context. This re-contextualization further disassociates forum members from mainstream recreational drug users and affiliates them with the alternative medicinal discourses found in the United States.

### **Research of a Forum Community**

As technology has improved and become more affordable, the participation in forum communities have increased, subsequently, so has the need for complementary anthropological research on new media discourse (Spitulnik, 1993). Indigenous communities and mainstream communities are no longer restricted to geographical locations. The national borders that segregate the world do not exist on the Internet (Spitulnik, 1993); rather, identifying with an “imagined community” (Anderson, 2006) through common interests strengthened by the adoption of community specific discourse redraws the borders in the virtual world.

In the past, research on media communications has concentrated on, what Spitulnik (1993) characterizes as the hypodermic model, which attributes agency and the interpretation of cultural identity to the person with the microphone, television camera, or publication. As explained by Spitulnik (1993), the linear model of “message production, message transmission and message reception” (p. 295) explains the transmission of information from a single source, to an audience programmed to absorb the information as truth (Hine, 2000). This model cannot be applied to forum communications; the message is produced and transmitted then received by the audience, but another dynamic of new media is the audience’s active participation in reconfiguring and debating the content of the message (Hine, 2000; Karaganis et al., 2008) by responding in what forum

members call a “thread.” A thread, in its simplest form, is a conversation that anyone can join in as long as they are a member of the forum. In this way a forum member is an active agent in the formation of the community’s identity. The members determine the persona of the community by aligning themselves with certain ideas and separating themselves from others.

## **Literature Review**

Part of my research entailed reading previous written literature on the topic of ayahuasca, virtual communities, and new media discourse. The literature that I reviewed on the topic of ayahuasca spanned various disciplines from ethnopharmacology, ethnobotany, psychology, and anthropology. The virtual community body of literature consisted of the historical background of online communities and the characteristics and behaviors of Internet users. On the topic of new media communications I relied heavily on discourse analysis texts and the small but growing body of literature on the anthropology of new media.

To understand what ayahuasca literature was considered the best, I asked the forum to supply a list of resources. Much of the popular literature they endorse focuses on an author’s journeys in the Amazon and their personal experiences with ayahuasca that provides a written account of things that they can relate to. Not to suggest that all ayahuasca experiences are the same; most of the time they are very personal. There are, however, commonalities in every experience that other ayahuasca drinkers can connect with. It is this shared bond that ayahuasca drinkers look for in a good book. I used their

literature suggestions to give me a sense of what is experienced during an ayahuasca session.

*Ayahuasca in My Blood: 25 Years of Medicine Dreaming* by journalist Peter Gorman (2010) was a book that was recommended to me by a forum member before it was even in print. This was due to the fact that the author has been a member of the forum community since 2000 and he writes from extensive personal experience with indigenous and mestizo ayahuasca use. I used Gorman's book to give me insight into the fear and euphoria associated with an ayahuasca experience and also how relationships form and fall apart in the ayahuasca community.

To gain a sense of the history behind ayahuasca, its discovery by the European conquistadores and missionaries as well as the dissemination outside of the Amazon basin into new contexts of use, I read Ralph Metzner and Jace C. Callaway's (1999) compilation of research and firsthand accounts in the book titled *Sacred Vine of the Spirits: Ayahuasca* (previously titled *Ayahuasca: Human, Consciousness and the Spirit of Nature*). Also contributing to the history of ayahuasca was anthropologist Peter Furst's (1976) book *Hallucinogens and Culture*. The author suggests that the "need to achieve an altered form of consciousness is innate" (p. 7) which could possibly explain the large number of hallucinogenic plants found and used in shamanic religions the world over. Psychologist Benny Shanon (2002) in *The Antipodes of the mind* states that what is lacking in scholarly literature was that most of the research and data collection was gained through second-hand experiences. Shanon took another approach, whereby he performed a self-reflective psychological study from 67 of his own ayahuasca

experiences. He provided background on the use of ayahuasca in the syncretic church context as well as the stages an individual drinker goes through while under the influence of ayahuasca.

A significant contributor to the world of Amazonian ethno-botany is Richard Evans-Schultes. He is considered one of the most authoritative botanists on the topic of hallucinogenic plants of the Americas, as a result of his 17 years of uninterrupted fieldwork in South America. He has three works on plant medicines that I have drawn from; *Plants of the Gods* (1979), *The Healing Forest* (1990) and *Vine of the Soul* (1992). Schultes work helped me understand the chemical symbiosis of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* and how the combination works within the human body.

I realized that studying ayahuasca entailed some familiarization of United States law and the freedom of religion, for this I relied on the anthropological contributions of Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Roger Rummrill (2008) with *A Hallucinogenic Tea, Laced with Controversy: Ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States*. Additionally, I used an article written by Ronald K. Bullis (2008) on the *The 'Vine of the Souls' vs. the Controlled Substance Act: Implications of the Hoasca case*, an overview of the arguments posed by the UDV and the United States government in the Supreme Court case *Gonzales vs. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal* in 2006. Steven C. Seeger (1997) *Restoring Rights to Rites: The Religious Motivation Test and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act* (RFRA) provided an indepth look at the RFRA as it pertains to a persons right to the freedom of religion.

In order to understand the behavior associated with online communications I reviewed a small but growing body of literature that studies the emergence of virtual communities and the importance of recognizing their influence on 21<sup>st</sup> century community formation and identity. Howard Rheingold (1994) wrote *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* featured a section on the beginnings of virtual communities. Robert Putnam (2000) contributed his views on the dichotomy of bridging and bonding in virtual community formation in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Also *Online Communication: Linking Technology, Identity and Culture* by Andrew Wood and Matthew Smith (2001) gave insight on the behaviors and characteristics of online communities and individual members.

To aid in the discussion of new media discourse I will draw from Debra Spitulnik (1993) with her research on the *Anthropology of Mass Media* regarding the previous research focus on the hypodermic model of message reception and how it has changed with the new media format. Richard Holt (2004) contributes his knowledge of forum communications and community dynamics in *Dialogue on the Internet: Language, Civic Identity and Computer Mediated Communication*. Joseph Karaganis et. al. (2008) *Structures of Participation in Digital Culture* and Christine Hine (2000) in *Virtual Ethnography* both contributed their views on the new media characteristics of message absorption and the virtual communities role in active debate.

In order to describe language use I adopt key terms from linguistic anthropology, such as register, media, healing and intertextuality, I rely upon a comprehensive study

done on linguistic terms and their definitions by several scholars in the field of linguistic anthropology. The explanations were edited by Alessandro Duranti (2001) and published in an issue of *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* called *Key Terms in Language and Culture*. Finally, I utilize Deborah Cameron (2001) and Susan Harding (2000) as models of discourse analysis and the notion of dueling discourses and discourse strategies that recast ayahuasca into the category of spirituality and against the mainstream view of psychedelic drugs.

### **What is Ayahuasca?**

In the words of Ralph Metzner and Jace C. Callaway (1999) “ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic Amazonian plant concoction that has been used by native Indian and Mestizo shamans in Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador for healing and divination” (p. 1).

The explanation above is plain, simple and true, but it lacks the multiple levels of importance that ayahuasca holds for the shaman, indigenous/mestizo communities, and non-indigenous ritual participants that hail from all over the world. Not only does it alter the consciousness (Shanon, 2002) but it uses all five senses to create a corporeal experience in what ayahuasca drinkers describe as the supernatural world.

Forum members describe ayahuasca as an experience that connects them to nature and blurs the line between sacred and profane. Participants describe ayahuasca, or the spirit of ayahuasca, as showing them the bad and the good, the horrible and the wonderful. They claim that she will take them places they have never dreamed of, or in many cases show them what is right in front of their eyes. Ayahuasca allows ritual participants to be an active partner in their own healing process and even the healing



process of others, but only if they are willing to do the leg work and follow the path of enlightenment which she has shown them. The spirit of ayahuasca has been referred to as a mother; grandmother and teacher, the spiritual embodiment of a plant medicine.

The name ayahuasca is Quechua for “vine of the soul” or “vine of the dead” (R. Schultes & Raffauf, 1992), *huasca* means “vine” and *aya* means “soul” or “dead” (Metzner & Callaway, 1999). It is native to the tropical forests of South America and utilized by the indigenous tribes in the upper Amazon regions, approximately 130 in all (Ayahuasca.com, 2010b), and native Mestizo populations that incorporate Old World religions and South American shamanism into their daily lives (Dobkin de Rios, 1972). Ayahuasca is believed by anthropologists to have been used since 3000 BC (Furst, 1976) by shaman to treat a myriad of health problems, a practice that has been extended and broadly re-contextualized into the mainstream context of ayahuasca as well.

The following is description taken from a collection of ayahuasca ceremony’s performed in the Amazon in an ayahuasca retreat or within an indigenous village setting to give the reader an understanding of what occurs during a ceremony.

Ayahuasca is a brew made out of two plants and usually referred to as a tea (Forum, 1999-2010; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Shanon, 2002). It is slowly boiled over a fire under the watchful and protective eye of the shaman, whereby he or she continually state his/her intentions by blowing out healing requests in tobacco smoke over the boiling pot to ensure a productive ceremony (Gorman, 2010); other ritual participants, referred to by psychologist Benny Shanon (2002) as “drinkers,” are sometimes invited declare their intentions too (4oDLifestyle, 2005). At nightfall the drinkers gather around the shaman

and each take a turn drinking a cup of the bitter liquid. After everyone has had their turn, the candle is extinguished and the ritual participants either sit or lie down waiting for the effects of the medicine to come on. This process usually takes about 20 to 40 minutes depending on the potency of the brew (Shanon, 2002), after which the drinker has the overwhelming need to purge (ibid). The purge, or *la purga*, is said to be the medicine's way of cleaning the body of physical and mental toxins and is usually celebrated as an integral part of the experience (Forum, 1999-2010; Shanon, 2002). The purge also transitions the drinker from the initial stages of the experience to the dreaming stage whereby the drinker's soul has been introduced to the supernatural world (Shanon, 2002). During this time the shaman is shaking a *shacapa* (bundle of leaves) and singing an *icaro* (a song sung for protection from bad spirits) (Gorman, 2010). The shaman moves about the drinkers either physically or mentally with his soul and guardian spirits, healing the participants or helping them through the experience.

## The Plants

The first and most important plant in the synthesis of the tea is *Banisteriopsis caapi*<sup>1</sup>, which is a critical component, not just as a chemical base but also animated as *the*

---

<sup>1</sup> When referring to *Banisteriopsis caapi* alone, I will use the term most commonly seen on the forum which is “*caapi*” or “vine.” To see a list of most commonly used names by native groups in the Amazon

spiritual guide or “plant teacher” (Forum, 1999-2010) responsible for the drinkers’ relationship with nature and the spirits in the supernatural realm. It has been implied that ayahuasca is not ayahuasca without *B. caapi*, even if there are other plants that can chemically take its place (Forum, 1999-2010; Grob, 2002).

*Caapi* contains in its bark three harmala alkaloids, harmine, harmaline and tetrahydroharmine (Shanon, 2002). They are  $\beta$ -carbolines that are a powerful inhibitor of the enzyme mono-amine oxidase (MAO) (Grob, 2002; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Shanon, 2002) that is found in most of the cells of the human body, more notably in the digestive system. It is responsible for eliminating excess tyramine, an enzyme that regulates blood pressure (MayoClinic.com, 2008). By itself, *caapi* can produce a feeling of euphoria and in some cases hallucinations or visions (Grob, 2002), but mostly it is considered to be the “gatekeeper” or “power” behind the ecstatic experience of ayahuasca (Forum, 1999-2010). Another example of the analogous relationship between *caapi* and the admixture plants was given by a member of the forum whose first experience with the tea was within an Indian village in Ecuador:

*SAM – The Napo Runa say that the Vine is like a cave and the Leaf is like a torch you bring to see inside the cave. The cave is the main thing, the light is just a helper. All the Indians with whom I drank preferred brew with admixture, but didn't consider it essential, and indeed sometimes added subthreshold doses of Leaf -- subthreshold in terms of DMT effects, but the Leaf has another, little-known role in the brew: the Leaf helps to potentiate the Vine as well as vice versa.*

---

please refer to the article “What Traditional Native Groups Use Ayahuasca ?” by Gayle Sachahambi (Ayahuasca.com, 2010b)

*Subthreshold doses of Leaf make the Vine effect stronger. Another way that the Leaf serves as a helper* (Forum, 1999-2010).

The leaf referred to in the above passage comes from an admixture plant. Although there are several plants that can be added to accentuate the qualities of the *caapi* vine, the one most frequently added to the brew is *Psychotria viridis*<sup>2</sup>, commonly known as *chacruna* (Shanon, 2002). Depending on the cultural practices of the native groups and personal preferences of mainstream drinkers, the use of this specific plant can vary or even be absent in some cases (Forum, 1999-2010; Grob, 2002) *Chacruna* contains in its leaves N, N-dimethyltryptamine or DMT for short (Grob, 2002; R. E. Schultes & Raffauf, 1990; Shanon, 2002). DMT is illegal in most countries outside of South America but legal in countries like Peru and Brazil where it is used in spiritual and physical healing practices. One can say that DMT is the component that adds the visual glitter to the ayahuasca experience. One forum member explained it this way:

*-The visions with content (i.e. pictures as opposed to abstract geometric designs) mainly come from the vine, but the colorfulness and the crowdedness and the sparkling glitteriness [sic] of everything comes from the DMT side.* (Personal communication, August 19, 2010)

DMT can be taken by itself, by inhaling it as a snuff, as seen in various tribal rituals in tropical South America (R. E. Schultes & Raffauf, 1990), or by smoking it. When DMT is taken orally, however, the enzyme MAO, discussed above, renders it inactive (Grob,

---

<sup>2</sup> According to Charles Grob M.D. there are over 75 plants that have been used in the preparation of ayahuasca by native peoples (Grob). For the purposes of this paper, any references to ayahuasca will mean the combination of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis*.

2002; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; R. E. Schultes & Raffauf, 1990; Shanon, 2002). So in order for the hallucinogenic “glitter” of *P. viridis* to be effective orally, it must always be ingested with an MAO-inhibiter like *B. caapi*.

### **Discovery and Dissemination**

There are approximately 150 species of hallucinogenic plants that have been documented worldwide, 130 of these species are found in the new world (Grob, 2002; R. E. Schultes & Hofmann, 1979). Archaeological digs in the Ecuadorian Amazon have unearthed evidence of hallucinogenic plant use painted on pottery, sculpted figurines, and snuff paraphernalia with residue from vegetable powders (Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Torres et al., 1991). Radiocarbon dating places the use of hallucinogenic plants in the Andes by various native groups since circa 3000 to 1200 BC (Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Torres, et al., 1991). However, specific evidence leading to the date of origin of ayahuasca has not been found. Anthropologist Peter Furst (1976) believes that when the tropical cultures of the Amazon basin changed from hunting and gathering and small scale horticulture to “intensive root agriculture” (p. 45) around 3000 BC, it is probable that *B. caapi* and the admixtures were among the cultivated plants.

### **European Discovery**

The first documented European accounts of the ancient brew came from Spanish and Portuguese chroniclers in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century (Guerra, 1971; Metzner & Callaway, 1999) and from Jesuit missionaries remarking on the natives “diabolical potion” made out of forest vine (Grob, 2002; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Taussig, 1986). It is argued by some scholars that hallucinogens have played a critical part in the origin of indigenous

religions (Metzner & Callaway, 1999) and the politically strategic idea that indigenous peoples were using hallucinogenic plants to supposedly “communicate with the devil” (Grob, 2002; Taussig, 1986) was posed by the Catholic church. The suppression of their traditional medicines and the forced assimilation of many of these tribes drove the use of such substances underground.

In 1851 English botanist, Richard Spruce, while doing fieldwork in the Amazon with the Tukano Indians, identified a vine used in an “intoxicating beverage” as *Banisteriopsis caapi* (Furst, 1976; Grob, 2002; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Shanon, 2002). Several years later he encountered it again with the Guahibo Indians of the Orinoco River and the Záparo Indians of the Peruvian Andes (Metzner & Callaway, 1999). Spruce sent a sample of the vine back to an English museum where it was reportedly lost for 115 years (Furst, 1976; Shanon, 2002). It was found in the 1960s and tests were performed on the vine section revealing that it had the same potency as if it were a freshly cut vine (Furst, 1976).

The first written account of the effects of ayahuasca on a non-indigenous person was written by an Ecuadorian Geographer named Manuel Villavicencio in 1858 (Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Shanon, 2002). The following passage is from *Geografia de la Republica del Ecuador* (1858) documents Villavicencio’s experience with ayahuasca among the native groups of the Rio Napo in Ecuador.

“ . . . As for myself I can say for a fact that when I’ve taken ayahuasca I’ve experienced dizziness, then an aerial journey in which I recall perceiving the most gorgeous views, great cities, lofty towers, beautiful parks, and other extremely

*attractive objects; then I imagined myself to be alone in a forest and assaulted by a number of terrible beings from which I defended myself; thereafter I had the strong sensation of sleep.”*

## **20<sup>th</sup> Century**

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century brought about the most drastic changes in use of ayahuasca (Shanon, 2002) as well as its introduction to the world outside of the Amazon and a broad array of competing meanings. Ayahuasca went from an underground shamanic tool for divination (Furst, 1976) to a sacrament embedded in the doctrines of the Santo Daime and UDV (Cefluris, 2000; UDV, 2010). In the United States ayahuasca became lost amongst the psychedelic “baggage” associated with the 1960s counterculture. Another competing set of meanings were attached to ayahuasca by practitioners of alternative medicine and by some research scientists that struggled to promote the usefulness of psychedelics as medicine against the lasting symbol of the “tune in, turn on and drop out” (Lee & Shlain, 1992, p. 149) nation of drug users during this era. Below I will treat each of these in succession.

## **Afro-Brazilian Churches**

In 1912, a descendent from African slaves named Raimundo Irineu Serra, migrated from the Northeastern state of Maranhão to the Brazilian state of Acre, attracted

by the flourishing rubber industry. It was there that Irineu first experienced ayahuasca with a native tribe from Bolivia; an experience that became a spiritual calling.

*“All who drink this holy beverage must not only try to see beautiful things without correcting their faults, but give shape to perfection of their own personality to take their place in this battalion and follow this line. If they would act this way, they could say, I am a brother”* – Mestre Irineu (Ayahuasca.com, 2010a)

Soon Irineu began to use ayahuasca as the indigenous shamans did, to heal the ill with the aid from the ancestral and plant spirits.

In the 1930s Irineu brought ayahuasca out of the forest and into a new context when he developed a syncretic religion he called Santo Daime (Ayahuasca.com, 2010a; Shanon, 2002; Tavares, 2007). The belief system of the Santo Daime is a blend of animistic beliefs, which is the idea that spiritual beings or souls exist outside of the physical body of the living thing, influenced by African and South American shamanism. As well as Christianity influenced by colonialism (Ayahuasca.com, 2010a) together with Mestre Irineu’s motto of “harmony, love, truth and justice” (Tavares, 2007)

Once again the use of ayahuasca in Brazil found a new context to flourish in the 1960s when rubber tapper Jose Gabriel da Costa created União do Vegetal meaning “Union of the Plants” in Portuguese (Shanon, 2002; UDV, 2010). Like Irineu, Costa experienced ayahuasca when working as a rubber tapper in the Amazon and felt a calling to spread his spiritual doctrine of light, peace and love with a syncretic influence of animism and Christianity as well (UDV, 2010).



Both the Santo Daime church and the UDV have become popular religious institutions in South America and in countries like the United States, France, Spain and the Netherlands to name a few. Portions of the ayahuasca.com forum have been dedicated to Santo Daime members called *daimistas*. Additionally, the ayahuasca ceremony has been seen in connection with Wicca, Sufism, and Sikhism (Forum, 1999-2010).

The spread of ayahuasca churches into first world countries has been met with controversy. On one hand, because of the DMT component, law enforcement agencies have been seizing shipments of the plants in the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France and the United States; and members of churches have also been jailed for their participation in distribution of illegal drugs (Forum, 1999-2010). On the other hand, the Santo Daime and the UDV are established legitimate churches in the United States and have been granted religious freedoms when using ayahuasca as a sacrament in their ceremonies (Beyer, 2009; Bullis, 2008; Seeger, 1997). The legal controversies surrounding the syncretic churches and their use of ayahuasca in the United States will be discussed in the section titled Ayahuasca and the Law.

### **Hallucinogenic Research and the 1960s Counterculture**

As ayahuasca has been depicted by non-indigenous persons, first as a tool of the devil by the missionaries, secondly as motivation for scientific inquiry by late 19<sup>th</sup> century scientists, and thirdly as a sacrament in syncretic religions, the context will once again change when ayahuasca is overshadowed and subsequently disregarded as a legitimate medicine by the mainstream society that largely associates all psychedelic substances with the disaffected youth of the 1960's counterculture. It became lost in

controversy and disregarded as a beneficial medical treatment due to the stigma of psychedelics as dangerous mind controlling drugs portrayed in the media.

The 1920s to the early 1960s were filled with monumental scientific discoveries. Discoveries in the laboratory contributed to improvements in modern medicine, chemistry, psychology, and the development of genetics. One such Researcher Louis Lewin was able to isolate one of the alkaloids found in ayahuasca, which he called banisterine. Today it is known as harmine, and his successor neurologist, Kurt Beringer, was able to use it in the treatment of Parkinson's disease (Grob, 2002).

Another scientific discovery served to place a taboo on the emerging science of psychedelic studies: the accidental formulation of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide-25 or LSD-25 by industrial chemist Albert Hoffman in 1943 (Strange, 2000-2010). It has been found that the use of LSD in a controlled setting has improved the health and quality of life for many people with cancer, cluster headaches and mental health problems (Caragol Wells, 2009). It has even been insinuated, but not proven, that the monumental discovery of the DNA double helix conceived (in part) by Francis Crick was accomplished under the influence of LSD (Rees, 2004).

Even the United States government performed top secret experiments using psychedelic substances. With the onset of the Cold War in the 1950s the United States military began looking for ways to improve their military intelligence and effectiveness in battle. The CIA became interested in the use of LSD as a mind controlling substance and began administering tests to CIA employees and military personnel as well as

unsuspecting civilians under the top secret research program called MK-ULTRA (Lee & Shlain, 1992).

These initial experiments of LSD and other related hallucinogenic substances brought psychoactive plants, but mainly their derivatives, to the attention of mainstream society during an era that was characterized by non-conformity, free love, and the “turn on, tune in and drop out” message circulated by Harvard Professor Timothy Leary (Greenfield, 2006; Lee & Shlain, 1992). The beneficial uses of hallucinogens were masked by the media’s focus on LSD related “bad trips” resulting in deaths and “acid eating cults,” the most famous being the Manson Family who were responsible for the murders of actress Sharon Tate and four of her party guests (Lee & Shlain, 1992).

The 1960s counterculture would do more to hinder than to help the scientific studies of psychedelic substances. Research on psychedelics soon became taboo (Grob, 2002) when the federal government, in the wake of bad press, made LSD illegal in 1966 (Caragol Wells, 2009; Lee & Shlain, 1992). Soon afterward the terms psychedelic and hallucinogenic, which were both stigmatized as dangerous and glorified by the media, were loosely applied to any substance that would produce hallucinations or visions. The teacher plants used by native tribes for thousands of years were included in this category and automatically loaded down with the verbal “baggage” associated with the 1960s counterculture.

Through the 1970s and 1980s psychedelic research was either prohibited or seriously regulated (Grob, 2002). Only within the last two decades have we seen scientific studies emerge about the benefits and drawbacks of psychedelic medicine. One

such study conducted by a conglomerate of scientists from the United States, Brazil and Finland (MAPS, 2010) was an interdisciplinary study of ayahuasca performed in the Amazonian town of Manaus, Brazil in 1993. The pharmacological investigation, dubbed the Hoasca Project, was an approved study by the Brazilian government and funded by various private institutions for the purpose of determining the safety, and regulated use of ayahuasca for human consumption. With the approval of the UDV, 15 members of the UDV church with 10 or more years experience with the sacrament and 15 control subjects were observed. All subjects had similar demographic backgrounds. Scientists studied the chemical, psychological and physiological effects of ayahuasca and documented the results. Dr. Charles Grob, the leading psychiatrist of the study, stated that all subjects attributed positive changes in their life to the UDV and the ritual use of ayahuasca (Grob, 2002; MAPS, 2010).

### **Contemporary Use**

Ayahuasca as it is used today by the transnational ayahuasca community represented by the forum is complicated. Since the mid 1980s drug tourism in places like Iquitos, Peru, has changed the ayahuasca experience from an indigenous ceremony steeped in traditional healing practices and divination to a commercialized venture. Ambitious Americans have set up retreats geared towards the new-age fascination with shamanism and “personal transformation” (bluemorphotours.com, 2010).

One controversy circulated within the forum concerns identity, ecological disruption, social discontinuity and shamanism. Ayahuasca retreats have increased the presence of non-indigenous shaman, called “white shaman” (Wernitznig, 2003), who

serve as an apprentice for a number of years under a recognized shaman in a community. Some of these retreats are the result of the white shaman businessmen and the lure of alternative healing. Media have proven to be a strong influence on the development of these tourist destinations with featured documentaries on the National Geographic Channel and articles written in popular newspapers and magazines like *The New York Times* (Salak, 2004) and *Time Magazine* (Otis, 2009).

The increased awareness of alternative medicine in exotic places like the Amazon regions has brought a number of entrepreneurs, altruists, and tourists to small, remote towns. The impact that has been made to the people in the towns and the surrounding environments has raised some concern among the forum community and the occasional reflection upon the ethics of ayahuasca tourism.

I asked a member about the impact of tourism on the people and ecology of Iquitos, Peru. This person has seen firsthand the rise in popularity that ayahuasca has had since the early 1980s. He writes about his experiences with what I can only describe as guilt and sadness at being someone who has contributed to the growth and popularity of ayahuasca but also an understanding that ayahuasca, if globalized, can help people overcome obstacles in their life. Below are portions of his reply:

*-...The biggest single mark was A.S. starting the Shamanism Conference, but there were other marks: The National Geo article on Blue Morpho, a couple of movies, and so forth. And most of it has been a mixed blessing. There might be 30 places out on the road from Iquitos to Nauta, each of which has cut down primary jungle to make a lodge type place for gringos. That's tens of thousands, of trees*

*cut down, hundreds of bands of monkeys displaced in the name of saving the rainforest. And each of those require probably thousands of more trees in maintenance/expansion next year. (Personal communication, September 2, 2010)*

Often times new-age followers are characterized as nature-loving, “that honor spirit above matter” (Wallis, 2003, p. 29), but their eagerness in their search for enlightenment has a lasting impact on the environment and people long after their enlightenment has been found.

*-During the last 4 years we have seen an unprecedented number of newbies come to Iquitos with a few bucks, fall for a curandero, and build them a place on the road to Nauta. Most of those places will disappear because of the costs. But they will have killed wildlife, stunted vegetation and done a host of harms in the name of good. The one constant in the third world is that all of the bad men have never done near the harm of those who meant well. That's just life, and it stinks but that's the way it is. Bringing curanderos out of their river villages hurts those villages. Bringing gringos in large numbers into those villages hurts those villages. Damned if you do, damned if you don't. Better to just get healed and walk away. (Personal communication, September 2, 2010)*

The interest in ayahuasca has also divided locals into two distinct economic classes, the poor who have been unable or unwilling to benefit from the influx of tourists, and the rich who are made overnight to cater to the whims of a new-age fad.

-...So what's with aya tourism? Well, it's brought enough gringos to Iquitos to keep several gringos making money in gringo restaurants. It's brought enough money to take a dozen legit curanderos off the rivers where they worked and bring them into the city to work with gringos, or into lodges to work with foreigners to the detriment of their own people. It's brought enough money to cut down hundreds of hectares of primary forest in the name of making aya retreats that are aimed at making gringos money and to share the knowledge. It's brought enough money to have at least two dozen people, some of whom never even drank ayahuasca three years ago into the realm of being "curanderos" because they've learned a few songs and have sycophantic acolytes. And it's brought enough seekers to have obscured the value of the true ayahuasca experience, what with the rules, regulations, and so forth that many of the curanderos now put forth. So, end result? Do gooders should stay the heck out because they spawn other do gooders. Evil men are identifiable and therefore not much of a threat. (Personal communication, September 2, 2010)

On the forum, ayahuasca tourism and the impact of ayahuasca retreats are a common discussion. There have been discussion topics like *Alternatives to Ayahuasca Tourism*, a thread that discusses the views above and provides other possible avenues for ayahuasca healing, and *Ayahuasca centers: retreats, healing and tourism* which is a discussion on firsthand experiences with shaman, ayahuasceros, curanderos and retreats.

Although there are many disadvantages to the growing popularity of ayahuasca on indigenous communities and the environment, there are also some good things that have

come from it as well. Anthropologist Marlene Dobkin de Rios and Roger Rumrill (2008) state that people traveling to South America with the specific purpose of participating in an ayahuasca ceremony should not be classified as “drug tourists” that seek the use and abuse of an exotic drug for thrills; rather they should be seen as people seeking spirituality and enlightenment by establishing a deep connection with nature that leads to emotional healing, something that is not often found with Western medicine. For that reason, ayahuasca supporters discuss the healing qualities of ayahuasca and other entheogenic medicines to mainstream society through news articles, documentaries and the forum to inform others of the benefits of indigenous medicine and spirituality.

As stated before, *B. caapi* is a natural MAO inhibitor, which is a chemical that has been used in the treatment of depression and anxiety (MayoClinic.com, 2008). Mental illnesses or disorders like depression, anxiety, addiction, ADD/ADHD<sup>3</sup> and OCD<sup>4</sup>, are discussed on the forum as primary catalysts for seeking alternative healing. A common discourse among many forum members includes being distant from life, and ayahuasca brings them back from isolation. One question I posted was “*What is it about ayahuasca or indigenous medicinal practices that attract you the most?*” I received several replies.

*HARRY - The potential to heal, learn, transcend, and rediscover. Embedded into this mystical experience. Very alluring. The fact that it is not something outside of myself requiring my belief, but instead an inside experience to be had makes it very genuine for me as someone who has had trust issues all of his life. Streams of*

---

<sup>3</sup> ADD and ADHD are acronyms for Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

<sup>4</sup> OCD is an acronym for Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.



*realizations and insights you wish somebody had shared with you when you were still a kid... Like the long awaited mentor finally showing up in your life, who is neither just yourself nor just the plants, but the alchemy between the two unfolding within one's walled-in self.*

*ADAM - The babes, of course. After that, it is the opportunity to engage in life in a process that re-sanctifies life in a way that is not commonly available in our post-post-modern bag of tricks.*

*DAVID - The healing and re-sanctification of life are the two top things on my list. The plants help me reconnect to life when I start feeling distant or alienated from it, where life ranges from the mystical all the way to the mundane relations of everyday life.*

*In short, it puts the spark back into living!*

I responded to the last comment by asking “What took the spark away?” and someone else replied:

*TOM - I don't know if the spark was taken away, or if like sparks do, they float too far from the wood, food of the fire. Embers that burn and fizzle out in their separation and disconnection. I drink [ayahuasca] to grow roots, tether to the fire, become fuel. Religion.*

This comment was followed by “Aho” from David, which means “word” or “amen,” an agreement with the statement (Forum, 1999-2010).

In contemporary use, ayahuasca is discussed on the forum as a healing medicine, but it is also discussed as a form of spiritual conversion in the context of spirituality. The responses above are examples of how ayahuasca has been reconstructed as a spiritual pathway for people. Anthropologist Susan Harding's (2000) research on fundamentalist discourse reveals that born again Christians talk about their previous life without God as a time when they were lost, and they discuss their life after being converted as being found. Forum discourse on healing, spirituality and ayahuasca is very similar to that of born again conversion discourse. Forum members discuss being lost in life, disconnected, depressed or anxious and the need to find something to help reconnect them to the world and to themselves.

Ayahuasca spirituality is described by forum members as a more personal experience between nature, spirit and the self (Forum, 1999-2010). However, the visual manifestations are both universal and individual. Past research done by psychologists and neuro-scientists (Grob, 2002; Metzner & Callaway, 1999; Shanon, 2002) has revealed similar visions and descriptions of representations from drinkers in a variety of environments and customs. The interpretations of the visions, however, can result in diversity. They may be geared towards the Christian definition of God, or they may be more animistic (Forum, 1999-2010; Gorman, 2010; Shanon, 2002) in that they attribute spiritual power to nature. One commonality across all contexts of ayahuasca use, though, is the recognition of the spirit of ayahuasca as a woman with the power to heal. The feminine spirit of ayahuasca is represented in the doctrines and hymns of the Santo

Daime and UDV churches, indigenous/mestizo ceremonies, and the experiences of the solitary ayahuasca drinker.

### **Ayahuasca and the Law**

Probably the most controversial issue surrounding ayahuasca in mainstream society is the question of legality. As discussed above ayahuasca is a combination of two plants one of which, contains DMT (*Psychotria viridis*), and has been declared a Schedule 1 substance by the Controlled Substance Act (CSA) of 1970 (Bullis, 2008; DEA, 2007). In the United States it is only available for legitimate research under the approval of the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Food and Drug Administration (DEA, 2009). The CSA was enacted to categorize the substances, new and old, that they have deemed to be a threat to the health of individuals and society. They base the categorization on three factors: how harmful the substance is, if it has the potential to be abused, and whether it can be safely controlled (DEA, 2007).

Since the decades following the comprehensive illegalization of psychedelic substances, the stigma surrounding them has intimidated Researchers from performing legitimate scientific studies on ayahuasca (Bullis, 2008; Grob, 2002). Without recognized research, the question of whether or not ayahuasca should be illegal will be unanswered.

The following section will discuss the legal ramifications of the CSA as it pertains to the three scheduling factors. I will discuss briefly the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances (UNCPS) and how it was used in a Supreme Court case. Both of these actions of the United States government and United Nations had a significant impact on the image of religious freedom in America. The precedent cases that have been

the result of the CSA and UNCPS will bring to light the contemporary use of psychedelic substances, religious freedom and indigenous traditions. The aftermath will bring about a change in language both in the scientific community and mainstream community that disentangles the concept of psychedelics from the 1960's counterculture and frames it into a new context.

### **CSA and United Nations**

Out of the growing surge of drug use in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the United States government began enacting laws to prohibit the use of drugs that were found harmful. In 1970 the government introduced the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) (Bullis, 2008; DEA, 2007), which categorized certain illicit drugs into schedules or sections defining them according to their rate of abuse, whether or not a substance can be used medicinally, and their accepted safety under medical supervision (DEA, 2007). DMT was declared a Schedule 1 drug, which is the most regulated schedule of substances that the CSA oversees. Schedule 1 includes LSD, marijuana (marihuana), mescaline, peyote, psilocybin, psilocin and a whole slew of other drugs that have been cultivated naturally or chemically engineered and processed into street drugs.

The increased awareness of psychedelic substances and the global connections that are created from import and export of illegal drugs caught the attention of the United Nations. The United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances held in Vienna, Austria in 1971 universally prohibited the selling and consuming of psychedelic substances in the 175 countries that signed the treaty (UNODC, 2010a). The purpose of the convention was to amend the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs of 1961, which

initially only covered cannabis, opium and coca and its derivatives (UNODC, 2010b), and add the growing list of psychedelic substances to the treaty.

The introduction of these two legal actions would come into play when the Brazilian syncretic churches the Santo Daime and UDV began to establish locations outside of Brazil and in countries where the restrictions on illicit substances are more strictly regulated and enforced. Not to say that drug use is any less illegal in South America, but many of these countries have large populations of indigenous people whose use of these substances is embedded into their belief systems, which brings up issues of religious freedom, indigenous tradition and comprehensive drug laws.

### **The Native American Church and the Restoration of an Act**

The latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would prove to be a time of drug law enforcement with the introduction of state laws, federal laws and even world laws prohibiting the growing, selling, buying and use of psychedelic substances. The institutions that enabled the blanket prohibition of these substances failed to take into account the rights provided to religious groups in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution under the free exercise clause. Because of past cases involving the denial of religious freedoms, the Supreme Court stated that the state must provide a “compelling interest” in order to deny religious rights to an individual (Beyer, 2008; Bullis, 2008). The state had to prove that a serious abuse of state and federal laws had occurred.

The first case to use the new “compelling interest” clarification of the first amendment in the acknowledgement of indigenous religion and their use of entheogenic

substances as a sacrament was *People vs. Woody* in 1964 (Beyer, 2008). The California Supreme Court overturned the convictions of members of the Native American Church that were charged with the possession of peyote (Beyer, 2008). Soon people all over the country were appealing past and current convictions of drug possession based on their first amendment rights (Beyer, 2008). The United States court system began to deny individual religious freedoms based on the first amendment as a result. However, in the case of the *Department of Human Resources of Oregon vs. Smith* (494 U.S. 872, 1990) the court ruled against the First Amendment rights of Alfred Smith, a Native American who had ingested peyote as a part of a Native American Church ritual. His employer found out about his involvement in the ceremony and Smith was subsequently fired from his job. Smith was seeking compensatory benefits from the state. The Supreme Court declared that “the first amendment no longer protects religious practices that conflict with valid and neutral law of general applicability” (Beyer, 2008; Seeger, 1997). Out of this landmark case came the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) which reinstated the “strict scrutiny test” of religious practices when they contradict “neutral general law” (Seeger, 1997). In other words, the government cannot burden someone’s religious freedom unless they prove that they have a compelling interest. The restoration of this act led to the members of the Native American Church winning the right to use peyote as a sacrament and the exemption from the CSA:

*The listing of peyote as a controlled substance in Schedule I does not apply to the nondrug use of peyote in bona fide religious ceremonies of the Native American Church, and members of the Native American Church so using peyote are exempt*

*from registration. Any person who manufactures peyote for or distributes peyote to the Native American Church, however, is required to obtain registration annually and to comply with all other requirements of law (DEA, 2010).*

The case was a victory for religious institutions as well as recognition of Native American rights and their traditional uses of entheogen's.

What does all of this have to do with ayahuasca? Both the *Oregon vs. Smith* case and the RFRA were used in another more specific precedent involving the religious use of ayahuasca and the UDV church in New Mexico.

In 1999, the DEA seized a shipment of ayahuasca that was bound for the UDV National Headquarters in Santa Fe, New Mexico (Bullis, 2008). The government threatened to prosecute the UDV stating that their use of ayahuasca violated the CSA (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008). The UDV counteracted and sued the government and appealed the charges against them. The Federal Court of New Mexico found in favor of the UDV under the RFRA. The government lawyers appealed the decision and it went to the Federal Circuit Court where they upheld the lower court's ruling. Once again the government lawyers appealed and it was taken to the United States Supreme Court where in 2006 the court ruled in favor of the previous rulings finding that the government did not meet the burden of proof (Bullis, 2008).

The government stated that the CSA gave no allowances to drugs categorized under Schedule 1, which ended up being the fatal flaw in their argument. As discussed above, the Native American Church was exempted from the CSA with their religious use

of peyote. The UDV stated that it was unfair to grant the Native American Church freedom to use a Schedule 1 drug as a sacrament and not the UDV. The government lawyers also argued for the laws established in the United Nations Convention on Psychotropic Substances. The Supreme Court declared that in cases of conflict between United Nation laws and the United States, the U.S. Constitution is upheld (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008). Subsequently in 2009 the Santo Daime won their court battle for the spiritual use of ayahuasca as a sacrament under the RFRA, following the precedent set by the UDV (Beyer, 2009).

Only recently, a headline from the Intercultural Communication Service, Servindi (2010), was brought to my attention. A Colombian ayahuascero named Taita Juan Bautista Agreda Chindoy was arrested on October 19, 2010 at the Houston International Airport for possession of a controlled substance. Customs confiscated 30 liters of ayahuasca from his suitcase and incarcerated him. If convicted Bautista faces up to 20 years in prison. Forum support and discourse associated with this case will be discussed under Data Analysis.

## **The Researcher and the Research**

In the Spring of 2010 I embarked on the most challenging part of my undergraduate school career: the Honor's Senior Thesis. I was excited and nervous about the task I had ahead of me, but I looked forward to applying all that I have learned in my university career to my own research. Being an anthropology student this meant that I would have to perform some type of ethnographic work with real human beings and not just conduct research in a library. My focus has always been on the peoples and cultures



of central and South America, but there was one problem; I had no money to travel. So my scope was narrowed to what I could learn at home. What I came up with would lead me on a journey that I never would have expected.

One day I was sitting in the library looking up artwork of South America, a potential thesis topic, when I came across some incredible paintings done by a shaman named Pablo Amaringo. The artwork displayed every color of the spectrum and demonstrated worlds completely unfamiliar to me. One word kept appearing with each painting I looked at, ayahuasca. I had heard that word before, but I couldn't quite remember where I encountered it. So, with the World Wide Web at my fingertips, I scoured the Internet and came up with the idea of researching Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (ITK) and mainstream society as it pertained to ayahuasca. It eventually turned into neo-shamanism and how ITK is spread through online forums.

I have to admit that I have never participated in a forum before so this task that I had assigned myself seemed intimidating at times. With a little help from my "computer guru" husband I typed up requests for permission to do ethnographic research from four forums dedicated to ayahuasca. Out of the four forum administrators that I contacted, two said no and one didn't answer. The fourth one, however, was very welcoming. After spending a week lurking thread discussions I decided to announce my presence. Each word I typed was analyzed, rewritten, altered and fine tuned. I didn't want to come across as stuffy, and I wanted to let my sense of humor show. The following post is my introductory post on the ayahuasca forums titled *A Nervous Student Introduction*:

*Hello everyone,*

*I am a cultural anthropology student doing research for my undergraduate thesis. The topic is neo-Shamanism and the ayahuasca experience (yeah...it's a working title). My goal is to study the community and culture that has formed around the ayahuasca medicine.*

*I wanted to introduce myself before asking any questions. I have been in contact with xxxxx (to whom I am very grateful for all her help) she said to just jump on in and say hi. Here is the thing...I have never written on a forum before and I am a bit nervous about saying the wrong thing. I want to state that I hold your views, values and beliefs to the highest form of respect. So if I say anything disrespectful or just plain stupid, by all means let me know.*

*If you would not like to be quoted but would like to comment on something I said just let me know in your reply...your wish is my command (she says as she bows).*

*Hopefully, as I gain some confidence there will be a link to a survey/questionnaire about your community. I may need some help forming some questions...any volunteers?*

*Also if there is anything you would like to know about me just ask...my life is an open book.*

*Salud y Bienestar*

*Erin*

*University of Nevada Reno (Go Wolfpack)*

After a few of the members got over the shock of someone never having been on a forum I received many welcomes, interesting comments and good hearted corrections.

I ended up spending my entire spring break, from March 13, 2010 to March 21, posting on the forum, answering questions about my research and receiving advice on

where to concentrate my efforts. I started to get a feel for how forum communications work and I even began to find my voice in debates. At first, I was concerned with projecting myself as a knowledgeable student of anthropology, but I was quickly shown that the members of the forum were made up of intelligent people with life experience. I soon found that many conversations on the forum were above my head, and I had to rely heavily on Dictionary.com for definitions and ask questions of my audience.

Over the summer, I received my Internal Review Board approval for my research with human subjects, and I concentrated on asking questions that were geared towards my research rather than getting-to-know-you questions and answers. I formulated a questionnaire (see appendix) and tested it with a couple of people on the forum who gave suggestions and approved the questions. I submitted it via online survey software called LIMESURVEY and gave instructions on how to submit the finished questionnaire. To date, October 28, 2010, I have 17 full responses and 15 partial responses.

The majority of my information was obtained through forum discussions that anyone could join in, which enabled me to see how community identity and individual identity came together and, in some cases, fell apart. Being a member of a forum also means being a member of an imagined community (Anderson, 2006) with an imagined community identity. Group identity can include people who are able to identify with the discourse and personality of the community but it also serves to exclude people who are unable to fit in.

Another method for obtaining information was the Private Messaging (PM) system on the forum. I used this venue to contact informants who preferred to speak in

private, to ask technical questions about forum conduct, and to ask people to elaborate on statements that they have made.

During the course of the summer I felt like I gained a place in the forum community both as a student Researcher and as an active member. I began to have favorite members whom I would love to banter with and whom I consider to be friends. But here is where friendship on a forum is very different from friendship in real life. Sociologist Christine Hine (2000) states that “for post-modernity the new communications technologies are part of a process where doubt is cast on authenticity, representation and reality” (p. 7). That being said, there is always the possibility that people are portraying themselves dishonestly. So how can one determine if a friendship is real? The truth is there is no way of telling. But by presenting an identity to others through a written media there is some expectation that what is read is only a small portion of the big picture. Self presentation can be skewed, either by the person presenting or the person interpreting the text that is written (Wood & Smith, 2001).

Self presentation was just one of the reasons why I felt that research on a forum was frustrating at times. Another difficulty that I ran into is the inconsistent availability of human subjects and their lack of obligation to participate in my inquiries. This problem is a typical response to research performed with online communities (Hine, 2000). Forum members come and go as they please; old members can decide to move on and new ones join almost daily. A new member may also join only for the purpose of obtaining information then cease to engage in discussions after that information is obtained. Additionally, when posting a question, I never knew if I would get a response. In some instances when a question I asked had become stale, meaning no one responded

to it or the responses had stopped, I baited the question by saying: “*So no one wants to field this one. Awe come on!*”

Despite these difficulties, there are features of forum research that are easy and accessible. Anything and everything that is written on the forum is archived and available through an Internet search. Therefore, all conversations that were conducted in the course of the research were documented and easily recalled. This ease of conversation recall was also true for any discussions that have gone on in the past, which was especially useful when researching community dynamics over a long period of time.

Another feature of the forum that I found helpful was obtaining different points of view on one topic. Most often I posted a question then was not be able to get back to it for a couple of days. During that time the forum members have contributed pages of conversation. The first few messages are called “core messages” (Holt, 2004), which creates the substance of the thread. Not to say that responses further down in the thread are any less substantial, but the further the conversation goes the less likely it is to be directly related to the original topic. More often a person responds to the last few posts in a thread so their contribution to the conversation is current.

Every time a member posts a response they contribute to their online identity by establishing a writing style and topic preferences. After a while I developed a sense for the members who responded to a certain type of question, the members who were quick to anger, and the ones who were great at easing a tense situation with well placed humor.

## Forum Communication

*"What will on-line interactive communities be like? In most fields they will consist of geographically separated members, sometimes grouped in small clusters and sometimes working individually. They will be communities not of common location, but of common interest. . . ."* J.C.R. Licklider and Robert Taylor of Advanced Research Projects Agency 1968 (Cited in Rheingold, 1994).

In 1968 the thought of being able to communicate through something called “cyberspace” seemed unbelievable, and the future of computer technology could only be an educated guess. Since then, users have come to rely on the Internet for long distance communications and personal expression like Facebook, My Space, chat rooms, instant messaging, forums, and blogs. All of these have a commonality; they all utilize a form of written discourse to connect people with common interests from across the world with diverse backgrounds. For some, Internet communication has leveled the playing field (Wood & Smith, 2001), whereby a person without social finesse, is able to contribute ideas, thoughts and feelings in a conversation. All that is needed is internet access.

### What is a forum?

A forum is a group of people that converse through online written media. Unlike a blog, anyone can post a question or statement and anyone can participate in the conversation, whereas a blog is centered on the writings of an individual and comments are made on the topic by the followers of the blog. In terms of social organization, forums resemble a more egalitarian society with hierarchy emerging with the level of participation a member displays.

The study of forum communities has been growing exponentially due the ability of the forum members to form new identities and even multiple identities, referred to as multiphrenia (Wood & Smith, 2001). Such research has resulted in a division of opinions as to the future of social relations (Rheingold, 1994). Do forum communities serve to isolate people within groups that have the same identity, excluding others in the process? Or do they allow people to form relationships based on interests in a burgeoning pluralistic society?

In *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, author Robert Putnam (2000) highlights two phenomena found in community formation. The “bridging” phenomenon is when diverse members of mainstream society find like-minded people in online communities. The result of this community formation is seen as positive where the likelihood of exclusion is small. Bridging communities can often eliminate social tensions based on race, age and gender. Examples of a bridging community are local community associations, support groups and fan clubs. The “bonding” phenomenon is when groups of people with similar backgrounds and demographics form online communities. These types of connections can be seen as negative in some ways due to the excluding factor that they propose. Examples of bonding communities are ethnic groups, religious groups and the more extreme cases of racist groups and extremist supporters. However, bonding communities are not all bad. In pluralistic societies they can form more social cohesion for people who are often marginalized in their physical community. Putnam (2000) is quick to point out that communities most often have qualities of both bridging and bonding. A good example is

found in the ayahuasca.com forums. The members come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, some are from communities where ayahuasca is embedded into their daily lives as a religious tool and some come from communities where ayahuasca is shunned for its relation to other psychedelic drugs. The forum bridges the gap between these cultures and provides a common ground for people to express themselves. In turn the ayahuasca.com forums also create a space where discussion of ayahuasca in any context other than spiritual and medicinal is not welcome. This may serve to prevent some members of the forum from being able to participate in discussion if they are unable to obtain the correct language.

Online communities, although they are different in many ways, still operate like any other community of people. There are rules that members of the community must abide by; there are administrators and moderators who are responsible for the upkeep and law of the community; and there are the members themselves which provide the backbone of the society, determining its content, tone and personality. There are even resident celebrities, although the classification of celebrity is different for every community. In the case of the ayahuasca.com forums, celebrities seem to be the activists, authors and scholars that publically support ayahuasca as a healing medicine and a spiritual guide. There are also the community favorites who have demonstrated a thorough knowledge base and whose advice is valued and called upon in many situations.

The differences between live communities and online communities are that communication is only through the written word; a members “real life” identity is unknown (unless the person chooses to reveal it). Any identifying factors that can be



judgments of character in the real world are not an issue. This quality of forum communication may seem nice given the importance mainstream society puts on first impressions, but written communication has its downsides too; a member does not have the luxury of facial cues and tone of voice when communicating to fellow members. These features of live communication are not given much thought until they are completely removed from the conversation. The lack of paralinguistic features can often lead to tension when the interpretation of text is taken the wrong way.

As online communication has evolved, so has the ability to ease community tension with the invention of the “emoticon” and rules of forum etiquette known as “netiquette.” The following section will be somewhat of a guide on forming an online identity and the obstacles one may come up against with this form of communication.

### **Anonymity and an Online Identity**

On most forums there is an element of anonymity that is involved. Anonymity is described by Wood and Smith (2001) as “a state of communicating where the identity of the communicator is not readily apparent” (p. 63) First and foremost forums are publically accessed and most of the time a user does not need to be a member to access the material. Membership rules vary depending on the sensitivity of the material discussed. On the ayahuasca forums there was a public decision to remove the “preparations” section from public view to protect the site from any liability (Forum, 1999-2010). In order to access this information the person must become a member. Becoming a member does not mean that the person’s anonymity is in jeopardy; on the

ayahuasca.com forums the only information that is required is an email address (Personal communication, September 2010).

When registering to become a member the person is asked to create a username, the name can be anything they want unless it is already taken by someone or it is determined by the administrators or moderators to be distasteful and against the forum rules.

After choosing a name, they have several options to build an online identity. The new member can attach a picture to their username called an “avatar”; it can be a picture of themselves or a picture that relates to their interests, or they can leave it blank. These forum features are seen by members as a reflection of their identity (Wood & Smith, 2001). The new member can also attach a signature. The signature appears at the bottom of a post and they vary in content. What I have observed on the ayahuasca.com forum is the use of a favorite quote, a prayer, or a link to a website they would like to promote. Both the avatar and the signature can be changed or removed at any time.

All of these member features do not jeopardize the person’s anonymity and they may peruse the forum at leisure. At this point they are defined by Urban Dictionary as a lurker, “someone who follows a forum but does not post” (“lurker” Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

### **Becoming a Contributing Member**

The next step to becoming a member is the posting of a response or beginning a thread (conversation) by asking a question or making a statement. The new member has,

thus, placed a written invitation for other members to comment on their statement and permanently places their online identity in the vast archives of cyberspace.

On the ayahuasca.com forum new members receive direction on where to post their question. The forum is divided up into categories or indices and each index has a brief explanation as to what kind of written material goes there. There is also a list of previous entries and the names of the moderators (managers) of the index. When a new member or lurker first gains access to the ayahuasca forums, the very top index is labeled “information” with a blurb stating:

*-Basic information about Ayahuasca. Please read the top threads here (including Forum Guidelines) before posting questions anywhere in the forum. Please post questions in the appropriate section. Safety questions (in relation to Ayahuasca) go here (Forum, 1999-2010).*

Within this index is a list of rules or guidelines that instruct the community on what they can or cannot do. The ayahuasca.com forum is dedicated to the discussion of ayahuasca as a non-recreational, spiritual medicine, therefore, any discussion on the recreational use of ayahuasca and its individual components may be deleted by the forum moderators and the member may be suspended for a period of time or banned from the forum. For the most part members adhere to this request, although, new members often bend the rules on discussion of recreational use. In my research I have found that any discussion of illicit drugs other than ayahuasca or other entheogenic medicines are halted by the forum moderators. However, any discussion of ayahuasca in the context of recreational use is usually criticized directly by the forum members. Therefore, forum membership is

shaped by the discourse strategies of the forum members themselves and the potential threat of not being accepted by the community.

### **A Threat to Anonymity**

As a contributing member of an online forum, the user must consider the potential threats to anonymity. The only true threat to a member's anonymity is the member himself. As the member becomes familiar with people who post regularly and they develop a style of your own, called textual behavior (Wood & Smith, 2001), their true personality will start to come out in the writing and the formation of an identity will be impressed upon others (Wood & Smith, 2001). It is in the subtle language that is overlooked by most, but in doing my research I became curious as to the ease of discovering someone's demographics. In some cases it was easy; people sometimes forget to use their username when signing the bottom of a response, then mention another personal aspect of themselves that let me form a complete picture of the person behind the screen. Other times it was more difficult to decipher whether or not the person was male or female.

Whatever subtle nuances that are revealed, there is still the feeling of anonymity that allows a forum member to be open with their feelings and ways of communicating that is not available to us in a verbal, face to face conversation. When relating something embarrassing no one can see a blush or hear a shy giggle, therefore, online communities allow members to freely express their opinions, feelings, personal sagas and spiritual journey's without the boundaries that are invisible, yet obvious in face to face communication.

## **The Sticky's**

As the new member moves past the forum guidelines and preliminary topics of forum membership, they can scroll down to find specific topics of discussion. At the top of every index are “sticky” threads. A “sticky” thread is a thread that, for some reason or another, is important to the community. The moderators are in charge of setting a thread as a sticky, based on member requests and/or pertinent information.

A thread is made into a sticky for the purpose of positioning it permanently at the top of the index. When new threads are posted they are automatically placed at the top of the index list, but below the sticky threads. This means that the threads at the top of the index are the most current or the most active at that time.

The forum has an extensive archive of threads that have been building since its creation in 1999. Threads that have not seen any activity in a while continually get pushed down the list by newer threads. These threads are not necessarily dead in the water. A member doing a search can find a topic that interests them and post a comment to revitalize the conversation. For example, one of the most popular threads on the forum is *“What does your screen name mean?”* It was started on October 23, 2001 and has a total of 265 replies and counting. Needless to say this topic became a “sticky” because of its popularity. It allows members to explain how they came up with their usernames.

## **Netiquette**

When first posting on a forum it is a good idea to look up the etiquette or “netiquette” that is expected, this may include netiquette that is specific to the forum, usually found in the information section, or general netiquette that is used universally (information on proper netiquette behavior can be found at [www.albion.com/netiquette](http://www.albion.com/netiquette)).

Belonging to a forum community means that the new member is supposed to know that **WRITING IN CAPITAL LETTERS** is equivalent to yelling, and being called a “flamer” in cyber talk does not have the same connotation as it does in mainstream society; being called a “flamer” or a “troll” on the forum means that the person likes to instigate fights with “insults and slander” (“flamer” and “troll” Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010). The antagonist in question may purposefully be trying to start a “flame war” whereby several people are involved in the argument, at which point the forum moderator or “mod” for short will usually stop the thread from continuing on by locking it down. If the problem persists then the “flamer” or “troll” in question may be temporarily or permanently banned from the forum.

Other questionable behaviors include the use of a “sock puppet.” A sock puppet is where a member creates two or more identities and will periodically switch back and forth between the identities in order to confuse members. One can also be accused of “hi-jacking” a thread, which means that a member’s reply has deviated from the original topic which generates responses according to the hi-jacked response. It can be hard to determine whether or not a hi-jacking has occurred due to the natural ebb and flow of an online conversation.

The majority of netiquette behaviors have to be learned from participating in the forum itself. One frustration expressed by some of the community members is the posting of a thread topic that has been addressed before, in some cases several times. Before a new member posts anything under a “new topic” they should always perform a search for keywords or specific sentences, which can be a chore in and of itself. The ayahuasca.com forums have accumulated over 18,231 topics since its creation in 1999. This number was obtained from the forum on September 13, 2010 and it excludes the private forums and the forums created for Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch speakers. Also, that figure is only a count of topic headings; under each topic can be hundreds of responses. So people are bound to re-post a question that they weren’t able to find on a search.

The re-posting of a question can lead to two different replies; if it is a common topic then members will post links to the information that is needed, or, after some light humor geared towards the member about not being able to perform a search, they may comment on the original question and start a whole new conversation on the topic. Seasoned forum members can usually get away from any community ribbing by stating this: *I'm sorry if this has been posted before, but I wasn't able to find it...* (Forum, 1999-2010)

Another netiquette type complaint is that people who are not informed about the Internet and the availability of information at their fingertips ask questions that can easily be looked up. During my first forum experience, I was the subject of some friendly teasing when I asked some common terminology questions:

*RESEARCHER - Hey everyone. I am putting together a PowerPoint presentation for a class on my thesis topic and I wanted to incorporate a glossary of sorts. So far the terminology that I have is: Bump, Flamer, Troll, (and the basics) Mod, Post, Thread, and Avatar.*

*Are there any more?*

*What terminology do you see the most on this forum and what do they mean?*

*What are some of the text abbreviations that you see a lot of?*

*Plus I want to make sure that the definitions for the words above are correct. Can you define them for me?*

Their response to my naïve questions were:

*ADAM: The Urban Dictionary, <http://www.urbandictionary.com> , probably has all the definitions you need for these things.*

*ELLIS: Is there an acronym for something along the lines of "let me let you google that for yourself"? 😊*

*ADAM: Why yes, there is. Try this resource.*

Of course the resource they supplied led me directly to <http://lmgty.com>, which is an acronym for “let me google that for you” purposely designed “for all those people that find it more convenient to bother you with their question rather than google it for themselves.”



Honestly, this led to some distress on my part and it brought up the question of “how do I know when a question or reply I have posted has insulted someone?” And “how do I know if I am boring them to tears with my stupid questions?”

Not wanting to sound like a complete idiot by asking these questions on the public forum, I decided to PM someone with my question. One thing that I have found with this forum is that they are very generous with advice and understand if a new member does not know what they are doing; the public ribbing on the thread, I found, was more of an initiation of a forum newbie than any personal displeasure with my questions.

The question I asked a member was this: *I have an etiquette question for you. How do I know if someone is insulted by my posts? I am looking for facial cues where there are none.* My informants’ response was:

*Unfortunately, you can't know 😞*

*Psychologists tell us that the majority of information that flows in a conversation is non-verbal, and that information is unavailable in written communication.*

*Misunderstandings are legion on the Internet, and tempers often run high.*

*The best thing one can do it to maintain equanimity, so that if people do end up taking something personally the fire can die down without being fanned by undue emotion. Beyond that, it's just getting used to a written medium and learning to write in the most un-threatening way you can. And you also learn something of the personalities of those you're speaking with.*

*If you avoid taking things personally, your conversational partners will (usually)*

*do the same.*

*(And all the normal things that one does in speaking help too: take the time to agree as well as disagree; give a compliment where one is due; etc.)*

*I'm sure you'll get it. Just think of what an anthropologist does when in the field: observe and mirror! (Personal Communication, February 2010)*

After a while things did become easier and I learned to use “emoticons” in place of facial expressions.

### **Paralinguistic Solutions**

A familiarity with emailing, or any type of computer written communication for that matter, presents a problem; the absence of facial cues and tone of voice that is so often present in a spoken conversation. The solution presented to forum users, chat rooms and other forms of computer communication is the emoticon. Wood and Smith (Wood & Smith) describe four forms of emoticons: smiley's, verbalization, description of physical actions, and word or utterance stress.

First, the smiley started out with the basic symbols put in succession to create a face. The most obvious one is the colon followed by a closing parenthesis :) when looking at it sideways it makes a smiley face indicating that whatever was said previously made the person feel happy or they found it humorous. After a while other versions became available to the point where it was common knowledge that :P was the sign for a joke (the smiley is sticking out his tongue), and that this ;) was a wink.

Eventually, smiley's became animated and were represented by the more familiar yellow face 😊. On the ayahuasca.com forum one can choose from a plethora of smiley's ranging from the standard, to animated smiley's that vomit on each other.

Because of its implications, the emoticon is a very valuable tool when utilizing the written communication of the forum and other online associations. As is verbalizations and abbreviations of feelings, for example, typing “hahaha” or “ouch” symbolizes a vocalized reaction to what is being said. “LOL” means *laughing out loud* and “IMHO”, a popular one on the forum, means *in my humble opinion*.

Description of a physical action is when the writer emphasizes a physical motion that would ordinarily be seen in face to face communication. I used this technique in many of my initial posts to supplement the lack of physical action that would embellish my dialogue: ...*your wish is my command (she says as she bows)*.

Last but not least is placing a stress on a word or an utterance. The above paragraph is a good example. In order to separate an example from the rest of the paragraph I italicized the utterance to make it distinct. Other forms of stress are asterisks, bold type, capital letters, or a different font.

### **Ayahuasca.com Forum**

Each forum has a personality. The personality is formed by the interactions between forum members, the rules of the forum set by the administrator, and the moderator's that control the material. There are members that test the rules and there are

moderators who put up with more than they should, but that also contributes to the personality of the forum.

The layout of the forum is relatively simple and easy to maneuver. There are 33 index sections with a description below explaining what each index contains. On October 28, 2010, when I accessed the forum there were a total of 184,754 posts and 20,972 topics from the moment of its creation in 1999, there were also 10,176 members of the forum, however, not all of the members are active, or even human. Many spam programs are able to join forums and chat rooms for the specific purpose of scanning the content for email addresses and website URL. Out of the 10,176 members only 296 of them have 100 or more posts, and the largest number of posts for a single person is 8,943.

My questionnaire was activated on August 30, 2010 and closed October 11, 2010. I received a total of 32 responses. However, not all of the responses were complete. The members were informed of their rights to privacy and given instructions on how to complete the survey and a link to the survey through a post. The volunteers for the questionnaire were able to pick and choose what questions they wanted to respond to, per the instructions given to me by the UNR Internal Review Board. Out of those responses, 17 were full and 15 were partial. 20 people supplied their age resulting in an average age of 41.5 years with a mode of 32, a median of 38.5, and a range of 42. Additionally, 21 of the responses listed their sex: 15 were male and 6 were female. To gain a better understanding of the makeup of the forum I asked the question:

*“Please choose which description suits you the best: Solitary drinker, someone who drinks mostly on their own; Ayahuasca retreat drinker, someone who drinks*

*mostly in an indigenous setting (characterized by ayahuasca retreats in South America or within an Indian village); and Syncretic Church drinker, someone who drinks mostly in the Santo Daime or UDV environment.”*

10 of the responses were solitary, 8 responses were ayahuasca retreat, and 1 response was for the syncretic church environment.

### **General Characteristics**

The ayahuasca.com forum is characterized as a community of practice. According to educational theorist Entienne Wegner (2002), a community of practice “shares three fundamental elements: a *domain* of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a *community* of people who care about this domain; and the shared *practice* that they are developing to be effective in their domain” (p. 27). The forum is a community whose shared domain is ayahuasca and the personal experiences each member has had while working with ayahuasca contributes to this domain. The forum community provides its members tried and true methods for obtaining the ayahuasca ingredients and solitary preparation methods, as well as feedback on individual experiences. The forum encourages interaction and provides a sense of belonging to individuals who recognize the proper way of discussing ayahuasca as a spiritual medicine rather than a recreational drug. The reasons above demonstrate why the ayahuasca.com forums are the best source for mature conversation on the topic of ayahuasca, spirituality and healing. The following are responses from the questionnaire question “*What sets the ayahuasca.com forum apart from other entheogenic related forums?*”

*-The depth of knowledge is, in general, much deeper. The people are much more mature (and I assume older) than on most of the other entheogen-related forums. While they are not frequent posters, some of the leading researchers in the field have made occasional posts. Other members have spent years of their lives "walking their talk" and living among the indigenous in South America, studying ayahuasca or other things related to indigenous spirituality (Questionnaire answer).*

*-My experience on the internet is that there is usually ONE place or community for a given topic that's "the" place. Rarely are there two or more. I don't know of another forum that's anything like the ayahuasca.com forums. The Nexus or whatever caters to an entirely different community for the most part. I think what sets it apart mainly is the exclusive focus on ayahuasca (well, and traditional herbs), and its stance on the legal right to use ayahuasca (Questionnaire Answer).*

The ayahuasca.com forums have gained a reputation for being “*kind and caring and showing a genuine concern for people*” (Questionnaire Answer). Often times when a person has become a member of the forum it is because they are going through troubling times in their life and they have heard of an indigenous medicine that can help. By confessing their problems, the new member is placed in a precarious situation. Their confession can be accepted or rejected by the group. Many recall traumatic events in their life that have resulted in a loss of self; others have said that they felt a spiritual calling and an opportunity for healing. On the confidential questionnaire I asked the question “*Why have you decided to work with ayahuasca?*” Here are some responses:

*-I often answer this question in different ways--ways that may seem contradictory, but are all true regardless. Some of the answers I've given in the past: To come to terms with the anxiety I have had (since my earliest memories) concerning death. To deal with depression I experience. To try to create meaning in my life. To explore what it means to be a living, conscious being deeply. To connect with the divine ground on being. (Questionnaire answer)*

*-I first came to the vine as a kind of last resort to address what had become a debilitating illness. Many things were wrong with my health, but alarm bells were ringing, literally, in my ears and shoulder. Years before, I had gotten into a very drunken, messy, bloody, worthless, gutless, mindless fight. During which I was beat down and cut up, and my shoulder dislocated. It was a dislocation that plagued and constricted me. My crumpled shoulder was, however, secondary to a somewhat mysterious dis-ease that presented itself via my ears. Increasing with intensity over the course of several years, my ears would pop and fill with fluid as though I were on an airplane. This would happen all the time. It would happen randomly. A chaotic and constant popping, crackling, ripping echoing feedback loop. Western medicine couldn't describe it and I was told by different doctors that I would just have to get used to it. It would go crazy when I was speaking, and so I found I was speaking less and less. I became shut in and isolated at the end of a very thin rope; gasping for breath, right arm falling out, speech difficult, losing eyesight, losing hair, losing my grip, leg seizing up, heart racing, ears exploding. I had read/heard that ayahuasca was good at removing blockages, and*

*I knew I was blocked. So I decided to give it a try. I knew it would not kill me, I knew it would not harm me. So I felt I had nothing to lose, except this illness.*

(Questionnaire answer)

*-Resolve outstanding emotional/psychological issues. (Questionnaire answer)*

*-I felt called to do so. (Questionnaire answer)*

*-Firstly for shadow work - integrating the parts of myself that I don't/didn't want to accept or face. Thereafter mostly spiritual work, expansion of consciousness and spiritual growth. (Questionnaire answer)*

If the new member demonstrates a language that is disrespectful of the medicine and spirit the forum members will make the new member aware of their language or the post would be neglected. However, each story that is written is usually met with encouraging words and a hearty “welcome.” The forum, at its simplest level, is comprised of strangers from all over the world. These strangers have gone through similar situations in their lives and found healing through, not only ayahuasca, but communicating with like minded people on the forum.

### **Respect for the Medicine**

One characteristic that is obvious and held in high regard to the community is the respect for the medicine as a powerful, knowledgeable spirit. Respect is demonstrated through ceremony, ritual, intentions, and individual actions while brewing and ingesting ayahuasca. And, on the forum, respect is demonstrated through language.



During my research I have witnessed several transformations from outsiders to contributing members of the ayahuasca.com forums, by first using language that is characteristic of mainstream society, then changing to language that adheres to the forums beliefs in spirituality and representing ayahuasca as such. Members take care in expressing their experiences and respect by eliminating recreational drug language from their lexicon. Since their community is formed through active participation in a written media, their language is seen as the key component that sets them apart from recreational drug users, who also form online communities to talk about their experiences.

There are recreational drug websites and forums that discuss ayahuasca and its hallucinogenic component, DMT, in relation to non-spiritual use. However, research in this area has not produced much information and forum members declare that the ayahuasca spirit does not lend itself to recreational use for many reasons: (1) ayahuasca has many contraindications with contemporary pharmaceuticals, and certain types of food, (2) the preparation time takes a minimum of 9 hours to extract the chemicals from the leaves and vine, (3) it has been said that the taste of the brew is difficult to get down, (4) ingestion of ayahuasca will cause the person to vomit, and (5) the effects of ayahuasca can produce frightening visions and sensory experiences. For these reasons, recreational talk of ayahuasca is usually limited to a few experiences whereby the person was unable to get a “high” that is equivalent to popular recreational drugs like LSD or DMT taken by other methods. When discussion turns to recreational drug use of ayahuasca on the forum, some members tend to be relaxed about the idea, almost daring someone to try it

recreationally. They see the vine as a formidable foe when using her for anything other than spiritual healing.

Ayahuasca used in a spiritual context, however, provides a different interpretation of the qualities listed above. By using language and actions appropriated from indigenous practices, they re-contextualize the drug into a medicine and perform actions that are what anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep (1966) and Victor Turner (1969) would classify as a rite of passage. The following observations define why ayahuasca is not widely used as a recreational drug according to the forum community.

### **Contraindications**

In my initial stages of research I had formed a hypothesis that mainstream ayahuasca users were searching for a kind of “instant spirituality” or “enlightenment in a cup.” I was basing my hypothesis off written accounts of recreational drug users, coupled with the new-age fascination of personal transformation. I was wrong. In order to safely drink ayahuasca a drinker must adhere to several dietary and medicinal restrictions spanning several weeks.

Modern medicines used to treat depression, anxiety, ADD/ADHD, and others, will cause a reaction when combined with the MAOI in *B. caapi*. The forum lists, approximately, 166 contraindicated medicines and herbs that could potentially cause a reaction called serotonin syndrome (Forum, 1999-2010; MayoClinic.com, 2009). It is recommended that the person abstain from taking their medication for a minimum of 5 weeks before they drink ayahuasca (Forum, 1999-2010) to decrease the possibility of

shivering, diarrhea, muscle rigidity, fever and seizures (MayoClinic.com, 2009). If left untreated serotonin syndrome can result in death (MayoClinic.com, 2009).

Additionally, common foods in a mainstream diet can contain various levels of tyramine, an enzyme that regulates blood pressure (MayoClinic.com & Hall-Flavin, 2010). The MAO is responsible for eliminating excess tyramine in our system and inhibiting this action can cause blood pressure to rise to dangerous levels possibly resulting in death (Forum, 1999-2010; MayoClinic.com & Hall-Flavin, 2010). Tyramine is usually found in aged foods like an overripe piece of fruit or cheese, smoked, fermented or pickled meats, and red wines, to name a few.

By eliminating contraindicated foods and medicine from their daily life, they are effectively performing the pre-liminal stage of a rite of passage, called separation (Gennep, 1966; Turner, 1969). In this stage ayahuasca initiates separate themselves from mainstream cultural practices by adhering to the ayahuasca diet and refraining from western medicinal practices.

### **Preparation**

Ayahuasca is prepared by boiling the ingredients, either together or separately, in a pot or slow-cook crock pot for several hours. It is recommended that the brewer boil the leaves and vine in three stages of three hours each. At the end of the first stage the remaining water is strained into separate container then the procedure is repeated two more times. This is to assure that the maximum amount of chemicals are extracted from the plant materials (Forum, 1999-2010).

This process is seen by forum members as an opportunity to show respect to the spirit that will guide the drinker in the supernatural world; the spirit of ayahuasca. The statement below comes from a sticky thread titled *Preparation as a Spiritual Process*:

*SAM- "The preparation of the Ayahuasca brew is part of the process of developing a deeper and deeper relationship with the Ayahuasca spirit. The Vine spirit is an active partner, guide, and teacher, and she most definitely seeks this relationship with human beings. She teaches people not only during the time of ingestion, but in the act of harvesting and in the act of preparation, as well as in the planting and the living with the companionship of the growing Vine." ... "The brewing process, among people who develop an active communication and partnership with her, is a magical communion and an art that becomes deeper and deeper, and that energy gets deeper and deeper into the brew. When you are drinking a brew made by someone who has cut the Vine with love and caring and songs, someone who has prayed over each Leaf as they lovingly wash it, someone who smudges their preparation space, blesses their water, makes the fire with prayers, caresses each piece of firewood that gives its energy to the brew, soplars the growing brew with sacred Tobacco smoke, sings icaros to the brew, marvels at the beauty of its colors, reads the messages in the designs that form on the top, and communes in loving partnership with the Plants for the many hours that it cooks -- you can feel that. Of course, not everyone does all of those things, but doing any of those things affects the brew." (Forum, 1999-2010)*

Observing the rules of the brewing process places an emphasis on the spiritual context of the entire process, from obtaining the contents until ingestion.

After the brew has been ritually prepared, the drinker enters into the ayahuasca ceremony. With solitary drinkers each ceremony is personalized to fit their needs. Some construct a “mesa” or altar made up of meaningful objects. Some play instruments or listen to icaros (songs sung for protection) before they drink, others observe silence. This is followed by communicating intentions to the spirits. Intentions can be interpreted as prayer, whereby the drinker asks the spirits to help them overcome problems in their life or help guide them to enlightenment. Each ceremony has a certain purpose for the drinker that isn’t taken lightly and further removes them from the recreational use of psychedelics.

### **The Taste**

As described by Peter Gorman in his book *Ayahuasca in my Blood: 25 Years of Ayahuasca Dreaming*, “the ayahuasca tasted like burnt grapefruit juice infused with dank smoke. It was acrid and almost impossible not to spit out.” Conversations surrounding the taste of ayahuasca are common on the forum:

*ELLIS - When I drink in the jungle, I don't have much difficulty with the first cup, sure it doesn't taste like candy but it goes through. The second one though, after the purge, is just impossible to drink. Not only does it taste horrible, it just won't go through my throat. A reflex sets in that closes the 'valve' and won't let it in.*

*And if I do get something in by cheating, it will be returned in a matter of seconds.*

*WILL – “Drinking ayahuasca has been fairly difficult for me. At times I have had to get the cupful down in small sips over a relatively long period of time. I always hold my nose. At least once I have accidentally gotten too much in my mouth and uncontrollably spit it out. For that reason, the thought of even attempting to knock it back smoothly seems like asking for a floor painted with medicine”... “I went so far as to see a hypnotherapist friend of mine (the guy is amazing). I felt a little sheepish about coming in with just "ayahuasca tastes bad, please help" but it turned out to be a very productive session.”*

*DAVID - Ayahuasca is indeed \*foul-tasting\*, but you can get used to the taste. Or you can do some non-traditional further processing with egg-whites (a kind of filtering technique that removes the foul taste). And/or you can also add milk and agave syrup (avoid sugar -- and do not use artificial sweeteners), and/or some cocoa powder just for taste (since use of cocoa must be with great caution and only small amounts with Ayahuasca). Milk neutralizes the foul-tasting tannins; egg-whites remove them.*

Many members of the forum believe that enduring the hardship is about conditioning the body to accept the medicine. The mind then believes that the experience to be endured is special, unique and spiritual. Therefore, some members have admitted to enjoying the taste because of the symbolism behind it.

*NOLAN - Really, truly, it is huge how much our thinking and conditioning affects the perceived negativity of the taste of this medicine. I have learned to be at peace with the taste, I actually kind of like it...it is intense, earthy, clean, plant-ish, bitter, medicine-y goodness. It alerts me body mind and soul that I am in a very deep, important, sacred endeavor.*

Indeed, conditioning the mind and body to accept ayahuasca in taste and in spirituality seems to define the forum. They re-contextualize undesirable qualities and side effects into a whole process to be endured for the greater end result of healing.

### **La Purga**

The purge, otherwise known as *la purga*, is the body's reaction to the ingestion of the chemicals in *B. caapi* and accentuated by the DMT. Purging stomach contents may seem like an undesirable reaction to a medicine, but with ayahuasca drinkers it is a sign that the spirit of ayahuasca is ridding their body of toxins and negative energy. The following responses were given to a question titled *Ayahuasca Preparation to Reduce Vomiting/Purging*:

*HAYDEN- ...I'm guessing this is probably not the answers you are looking for, but this board tends to be what I will call 'traditionalist', and I think what you will find is that a lot of indigenous groups work with ayahuasca specifically for the purging. It's thought that the purge is casting off negative energy that we accumulate in our everyday lives. Therefore there hasn't been a lot of effort directed towards making a recipe or method for a 'purgeless' ayahuasca.*

*DAVID- Go with the purge, not against it, and your Ayahuasca adventures will be so much more meaningful and emotionally powerful.*

*LUCAS-...purging is a part of the process. I dream in my room and use a bucket, which is always very close by...*

*KEVIN - Every purge is sacred.*

*Every purge is great.*

*Every purge is wanted.*

*Every purge is good.*

*Every purge is needed*

*In your neighbourhood.*

*KALEB- You need the purge...let the healing begin...*

*La purga* is an action that is directly connected to the medicine and the spirit, and, therefore, associated with healing. Believing in the healing qualities of the medicine and the teachings of the spirit as a process that occurs within the body, ayahuasca drinkers welcome every aspect of the purge as a necessary step to becoming cleansed and a sign of being ready to transition into the next phase of the medicine (Shanon, 2002), the visual phase.

### **At the Mercy of the Spirit**

After the purge, in some cases before, the ayahuasca spirit leads the drinker's soul or spirit on an educational journey to learn about the self. Each experience is different for



every person. The experience can be felt through any of the five senses and they can be good experiences or bad experiences:

*WESLEY- Some Ayahuasca "visions" may be experienced as emotions, intuitions, guidance, "inner visions", sounds, conversations, and so forth.*

*That might be stretching it in some cases, though, where it's hard to discern if it's you just imagining something, or actual communication with the plants. Or as sort of blanket description for the way the plants communicate.*

Vision is a term that is often used because the majority of mainstream society associates hallucinations with visions, ayahuasca provides much more. A member of the forum stated that they use the term vision because it is commonly heard and easily understood:

*SAM- Yes, the word "visions" is ambiguous. We use the word "visions" because it is an accepted word in English, but the "visual" part may not be the most important part, may not even be present. "Messages" or "revelations" may be more appropriate words in some ways, but they aren't perfect either.*

No matter what a person has done to prepare themselves for this experience they are at the mercy of the spirit of ayahuasca. It has been said that “ayahuasca gives you what you need, not what you want” (Gorman, 2010). The spirit will show the drinker what she chooses, so the intentions that have been silently stated before ingesting the brew may very well be ignored. Instead, the spirits may show the drinker things that they are not ready to confront. I asked one person what was so frightening about the visions he had and he replied:

*-The visions... There are two things about them, the visions themselves, and then my reaction to them... I can't recall except I tended to see the same kinds of stuff a lot, and ...brilliant colors against the black void, things and crazy faces moving through 10th dimensional space; lines of radiant light. I can almost ALMOST see how someone else seeing the exact same visions could have been in ecstasy at the BEAUTY, but instead it frightened the bejesus out of me... I CANNOT TELL YOU WHY I WAS SO TERRIFIED. I CANNOT TELL YOU WHY I WAS SO TERRIFIED. I have no words to describe the terror. I want to be able to tell you, to communicate this to you but it is beyond my conscious mind's ability/comprehension to express. (Personal communication, April 22, 2010)*

Because of his reaction to ayahuasca as an “unrelenting, grinding, mind gripping terror” he said the spirit of ayahuasca had given him a mantra to recite in order to ease his fears.

*-I repeated this mantra whenever I felt scared during ceremony (virtually always). I'm convinced that the spirit of ayahuasca gave me this mantra. The mantra [is], to remind myself to learn to simply be present here/now, and to have trust in the medicine, who IS the GREAT TEACHER. When I'd start to freak, I was to come back out of my mental trips and fear and be present. Fear is just another disguised ego trip, and I needed to learn to give those up. My job in ceremony was not to freak out, that was not why I was there. My job was to follow the Teacher (the medicine). "THAT IS ALL" means that is all I was there for; to follow the medicine. Ayahuasca teaches humility. If you can be truly humble... recognize that humans are not the most spiritually evolved species on Planet*

*Earth. We're just a bunch of monkeys. The medicine plants are the true spiritual masters and intellects on this world. Ironic huh? One of the worst criticisms we make about someone is to say, that guy's a vegetable...! Worse than an idiot or a fool, he has no mind left at all, right? The reality, so I learned firsthand, is the reverse. It is us that are the monkeys, the brainless fools, and it is the plants who are the Great Teachers. (Personal communication, April 22, 2010)*

Working with ayahuasca in a spiritual context can be seen as a challenge that, when met, rewards the drinker with visual guidance on how to fix certain aspects of their life, how to deal with hardships, and how to interpret the world through a new set of lenses that have just been given to them. From a recreational point of view, enduring the hardships and processes listed above for a possible end result of terror usually prevents long term use of ayahuasca as a recreational drug.

The preparation, ceremony, enduring the taste, *la purga*, and finally experiencing the visual effects of the teacher plant all falls under the liminal stage of a rite of passage, called the transitional stage (Gennep, 1966; Turner, 1969). In this stage the drinker endures the hardships of physical discomfort, and follows prescribed ceremonial activities supplied to them by the forum index called *Preparations*. Then their agency is stripped from them as they are powerless against the visions and experiences that are presented to them during the experience. Technical knowledge is presented to them by the plant spirits and ancestors of the supernatural world. Ayahuasca initiates may also feel a sense of community that Turner named *communitas* (Turner, 1969), whereby the initiate identifies with others going through the same rite of passage.

The post-liminal stage for a solitary drinker, who is a member of the forum, is being accepted into the group as an equal, equipped with agency and the register to speak about their dreaming with experience and knowledge. This is usually done with a written narrative of the ayahuasca experience followed by other forum members saying: “thanks for sharing your story” or other words of congratulations and encouragement.

## **Data Analysis**

Throughout this paper I have use the terms “psychedelic,” “hallucination,” “psychotropic,” “drug” and the terms “use” and “user” fairly liberally when describing the history of ayahuasca and how it is viewed in mainstream society. These terms are what I call “loaded.” Each of those words has a history, a meaning behind it, and in many cases the meaning obscures the way ayahuasca has been used traditionally and how it is currently being used by mainstream drinkers.

A register, in linguistic anthropology, is described as a discourse contained within a specific social situation (Agha, 2005). The ayahuasca.com forums maintain a register that has been adapted from indigenous spirituality and alternative medicine in order to define their identity as being on the fringes, if not completely separate, from the mainstream drug culture. I have found, during the course of my research, that the language of the forum plays a vital role in how the community portrays itself in mainstream society. Their language gives them a community identity, and the individual an identity in relation to the group. It defines them as dedicated patrons of, what they term, as indigenous medicine, indigenous spiritual beliefs and in some cases syncretic

church beliefs. The ayahuasca register removes them from the language associated with recreational drug forums and aligns them with the sanctioned use of ayahuasca as a spiritual medicine among the Santo Daime and UDV churches, but without the institutional protections given to the churches by the nation. The following data analysis will identify three methods that serve this purpose: word substitution, spiritual discourse, and medicinal and healing discourse.

### **Word Substitution**

In mainstream language anything that a person ingests that alters a function of the body, whether it is to cure a disease or illness or to alter one's state of mind, can be considered a drug (Dictionary.com, 2010). Therefore most people who have read the bare minimum on entheogen's would consider the term "drug" to be fitting, and the history of entheogen's, like peyote, mushrooms, cannabis among others, in mainstream language supports this view. However on the ayahuasca forums the term drug is almost never used. When it is, the person who used it is instantly corrected. Not only does the use of recreational drug related words go against the community rules of avoiding illicit drug discussion on a public forum, but they go out of their way to emphasize the spiritual and medicinal side of ayahuasca.

The description of drugs is determined by the forum, to have no relevance to their use of entheogen's as a spiritual use of substances (Forum, 1999-2010). One such forum member corrected another member's use of the word "drug" and the word "hallucinogen" when responding to a question I had asked about relating their ayahuasca experiences to the outside world:

*JERRY - ...I then told him that the caapi tea is legal, and he expressed the fear that maybe he would like it so much he would get addicted and start doing it all day every day. Which is of course ridiculous, since, because it is a psychological drug, it can be exhausting, and also you would eventually have a bad trip if you were abusing it. He is also worried that I could get hurt. I think he isn't totally off on that one, because it is a powerful hallucinogen. But, I have some practice and am exceedingly careful. Also, these drugs seem to have an intent not to harm if used with respect.*

*PATRICK - "Not to nitpick, but if you are drinking ayahuasca, Banisteriopsis caapi, with chacruna or chaliponga, than [sic] I think the words "hallucinogens" and "drug" have no place in the conversation. You're really talking about a visionary medicine, something that heals by allowing you or the curandero to access other levels of reality--non-hallucinatory--to discover the imbalances that are causing symptoms of what we call illness here on this plane. You correct those imbalances on those other levels and the symptoms disappear here. That's a far cry from the general meaning of "drug" or hallucinogen in common usage.*

*So, again, sorry to nitpick but I think those are important things to keep in mind in conversation about ayahuasca.*

*Unless of course, you really view it as a hallucinogenic drug."*

As the term drug is eliminated from the vocabulary of this sub-culture, there needs to be a replacement. For the most part the term "entheogen" has been accepted in its place as a

term that is described as “generating the divine within” (Dictionary.com, 2010; Forum, 1999-2010). To understand the reasons for this purposeful change in language I asked the forum to explain why they used some words in place of others:

*RESEARCHER - “I have to admit that the first time I heard the word "entheogen" I had to look it up. Then, when writing my many proposals to do this study, I had to explain the term over and over again to people who were interested in my thesis.*

*Why do you prefer to use this term?*

*Does it have legal implications?*

*Does it separate the medicinal use from the recreational use?*

*When people use the other (i.e. hallucinogen or psychedelic) terms to describe ayahuasca do you correct them? If so, how?*

Here are some of their responses.

*EVAN - Why do I prefer one term over another? This is the best way I can describe it:*

*"Entheogen" has an implication, by definition, of being associated with spiritual or shamanic work. Something along the lines of "creating god within" is what the word breaks down to. From my experience, this is how I see Aya and other psychoactive medicinal plants. Entheogen implies purpose to me, how the plant is used. You could use an "entheogen" recreational, but that wouldn't be "entheogenic" use of the plant. Ayahuasca is not a plant that I would consider conducive to recreational use, though, and its primary application fits more as a*

*“pure entheogen” than say mushrooms or cannabis do.*

*Hallucinogen is more clinically western, and has certain implications of "falseness," despite the fact that the term hallucinogen doesn't actually imply hallucination. The terminology also attempts to define and break down the substances in a more clinical way, or at least this is the way I perceive the word. A lot of different substances fall into the "hallucinogen" category, and while technically correct in western, it is a very limited word.*

*Psychedelic is more applicable (and per Wikipedia, is a subcategory of Hallucinogens) to the experience of and definition of the effect a psychedelic has on the user. The "psychedelic" substance causes a "psychedelic" effect. It's a little too limited for me, as Ayahuasca is more than just the psychedelic imagery and experience. It's like describing a Rose as red, but ignoring that it's also a flower, and failing to recognize the meaning that it has when given from one person to another. So while it falls into this category clinically, it again only describes a piece of the experience, while omitting the spirit/god connection that entheogen implies.*

*Drug has several things inherently sticky about it. First, “drug” as a prescribed medication has limits on its applicability to Ayahuasca. While it is used medicinally, it's not a “drug” as western pharmacology would typically recognize. Secondly, “drug” as a “recreational substance used to cause the body to have specific reactions for pleasure” is difficult to attach to Ayahuasca. It's more medicine than fun, unless vomiting and diarrhea is your cup of tea, no pun intended 😊. Logistically, it's hard to take recreationally. Finally, Ayahuasca*



*doesn't cause addiction like other substances identified as "drugs," and has in fact been used to treat substance addiction in South America. In that way, it's more of a solution to drug abuse than a drug itself.*

*This is what the words mean to me. I'm curious to hear if anyone else has a different take on this! 😊*

*SAM - "Hallucinogen" is the least appropriate word. It literally means "generating hallucinations," which by definition are false perceptions, considered pathological. Hallucinations are not visions of spiritual realms but by definition are confused with "reality," not distinguishable by the sufferer from physical consensus reality. This description does not fit Ayahuasca (or psychedelics such as mescaline, psilocybin, or LSD either, but it fits dissociatives like the Daturas.) "Psychedelic" describes a class of effects, and I would say that Aya [ayahuasca] fits in the broad category of psychedelics, along with substances such as LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin. Usually we tend to avoid calling Aya a psychedelic since it associates Aya with psychedelics that are used recreationally, and we usually want to avoid that connotation.*

*"Entheogen," meaning "generating the divine within," was originally coined as an alternative to "psychedelic" to describe psychedelics that are used for spiritual purposes. In my opinion, "entheogen" is defined by the way something is used; a Psilocybe mushroom is an entheogen or not depending on the intent with which it is used. And, furthermore, entheogen's are not limited to psychedelics; Tobaccon which is not a psychedelic, is used entheogenically in indigenous cultures*

*throughout the Americas. Aya is almost by definition an entheogen, because it doesn't lend itself to recreational use at all, only entheogenic use.*

*"Drug" has multiple, ambiguous and contradictory connotations. You could call television a "drug," for example. Most of the connotations of the word "drug" are not appropriate for Ayahuasca.*

*HAYDEN - I think the main reason is the other terms carry a lot of baggage that would pigeon-hole ayahuasca. Entheogen is a new word so people are willing to hear it out.*

*Hallucinogen to me sounds like I'm going to see things that aren't real.*

*'Psychedelic' makes me think of black-light posters of spirals and the Doors. Its meaning, "Revealing the mind/psyche" is too cerebral for me to accurately describe ayahuasca. Ayahuasca for me is a very gut-oriented medicine. I think ayahuasca works as much with the enteric nervous system as it does the brain.*

*'Psychedelic' has connotations of entertainment and recreation.*

*And of course, 'drug' is a catch-all for bad things like cocaine, crack, crystal meth. A drug is something you can become addicted to. Even though alcohol, caffeine, cocaine, prozac, cancer medicine, etc. are all drugs, to say that your spirituality is centered around drugs sounds bad and escapist, IMHO.[In My Humble Opinion]*

*Entheogen, "revealing the Divine", is the best broad-category term I think can be used. It doesn't have much baggage of negativity or falsehoods. It's even a bit respectful 😊. It communicates the seriousness of this practice.*

*Though if I had to make up a term, it would be like Connectogen. It connects you to your body, to the Earth, to plants and the living ecosystem, to your friends and family, to society and community, to strangers, to God and to Reality, and helps you integrate your psyche. Ayahuasca gets you into it, it doesn't help you escape from anything.*

The responses above generated more conversation on words that felt should be used to describe ayahuasca. The members were exhibiting their ability to create words that better defined what ayahuasca means to them. Words like “connectogen,” “revelatory,” “visionary,” and “pharmakon” a Greek word for medicine, drug or remedy.

*SAM - All three of those terms are problematic. We should take nominations or suggestions for a new term. "Visionary" might be good if we remember that "visions" are not necessarily always in visual form. I nominate "revelatory." Ayahuasca is in a class of "revelatory" plants or substances. Anybody second that? Anybody have another suggestion to nominate?*

*ALEX - The term psychedelic is coming back in vogue after the Psychedelic Science in the 21 Century Conference which of course had a full blown Ayahuasca track.*

*Perhaps it's baggage is being shed and it is once again coming back to its original phenomenological meaning of "mind" manifesting ( psyche/mind =cognitive-emotive-sensual-perceptive)*

*In the end what counts on the social as well as personal level is whether we learn how to use its power to gradually transform ourselves with kindness, clarity,*

*courage, wisdom, creativity and mystery. Those qualities will trump any seemingly positive, pejorative or neutral term.*

*SAM - I would like to see the word "psychedelic" rehabilitated and reclaimed. I don't think that there is anything intrinsically wrong with placing Ayahuasca in the class of substances called psychedelic, were it not for the social factor -- the fact that other psychedelics have the baggage of recreational use and (especially in the case of LSD) a long history of propaganda campaigns made up mostly of fabrications that have been used against them. I am glad that MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Sciences) is rehabilitating the word psychedelic and the reputation of psychedelics, because used properly psychedelics can be enormously beneficial (and, freedog [my username], most of the other psychedelics won't put you through the ordeal that Aya does, but that ordeal is an important part of the unique healing power of Aya).*

*Nevertheless, there is a long way to go. There is not only the specific propaganda campaigns against certain psychedelics like LSD, but the fact that (in mainstream media) the word "psychedelic" is usually part of the phrase "psychedelic drugs." and "drugs" in turn equals crack babies and meth labs and heroin addicts and all kinds of baggage that we don't need at a time when Aya is on a trajectory of legal recognition for spiritual use, in part because of its clean record with regard to all the bad things people associate with "drugs."*

*HAYDEN - I like the aspects introduced by 'revelatory', but it sounds like 'reveling' -- a celebration or party. So the immediate hearing of this might feed*

*into other negative stereotypes, of partying and unconsciousness.*

*I also like psychedelic in its original sense, but the word psychedelic itself has so much baggage, and then it's meaning, 'mind-manifesting' also has baggage in the word 'mind' -- people think of logical, cognitive processes, like this is going to help you do math equations or figure out the Theory of Everything. It's too cerebral a connotation for me. People don't think of mind in the wholistic [sic] sense these days.*

*I think a good term would include the purging and bodily aspects of it. And also healing. Something that indicates also the work involved in working with it. Though I think 'medicine' is a good term. It has a balance of good and bad connotation. I think people understood the meaning of it in *\_Dances with Wolves\_*.*

*I might also hazard to nominate 'pharmakon', the Greek word for drug. It's an old word, but doesn't have a lot of baggage.*

By recognizing the language above, new members find out quickly what becoming a member of the ayahuasca.com forums means. The spiritual and respectful discourse that is associated with the corporeal experience. For example, instead of saying “my last “trip” on ayahuasca...” members prefer to say “my last dream with ayahuasca...” After spending the summer researching the forum, I also began to use the terminology in my conversations on the forum, as well as in everyday life when describing my research.

Some common substitutions for words used by mainstream society are listed below:

Mainstream	Definition (Dictionary.com,	Forum	Definition/interpretation
------------	-----------------------------	-------	---------------------------

word	2010)	replacement	
<b>Trip</b>	An instance or period of being under the influence of a hallucinogenic drug, esp. LSD. The euphoria, illusions, etc., experienced during such a period.	<b>Dream/dreaming</b> <b>Experience</b> <b>Journey</b>	To be under the influence of ayahuasca where the mind, body and soul meets spirits and ancestors in the supernatural world.
<b>Hallucination</b>	A sensory experience of something that does not exist outside the mind, caused by various physical and mental disorders, or by reaction to certain toxic substances, and usually manifested as visual or auditory images. A false notion, belief, or impression; illusion; delusion.	<b>Vision</b>	A sort of blanket description for the way the plants communicate. Some Ayahuasca "visions" may be experienced as emotions, intuitions, guidance, "inner visions", sounds, conversations (Forum, 1999-2010)
<b>Diet, fast</b>	A particular selection of food, esp. as designed or prescribed to improve a person's physical condition or to prevent or treat a disease. Food restrictions.	<b>Dieta</b>	A restriction of food, sexual contact, social contact and modern technology to improve the communication between the plant spirits and the ritual participant
<b>User (noun)</b> <b>Use (verb)</b>	(n) One who uses drugs, esp. as an abuser or addict. (v) To drink, smoke, or ingest habitually.	<b>Drinker (noun)</b> <b>Drink (verb)</b> <b>Work with...</b> <b>Commune</b> <b>Helping, Partaking in...</b>	(n) Someone who ingests ayahuasca as a spiritual medicine. (v) The act of ingesting ayahuasca for guidance and connection to nature.
<b>Vomit</b>	To eject the contents of the stomach through the mouth; regurgitate; throw up.	<b>La purga</b> <b>The purge</b>	To cleanse the body of negative energy, physical and mental toxins accumulated in everyday life.
<b>Drug</b>	A chemical substance used in the treatment, cure, prevention, or diagnosis of disease or used to otherwise enhance physical or mental well-being. A habit-forming medicinal or illicit substance, esp. a narcotic.	<b>Medicine</b>	Any substance or substances used in treating disease or illness; medicament; remedy. (Among North American Indians) any object or practice regarded as having magical powers. (Dictionary.com, 2010)

Table 1 A list of word substitutions and their definitions

## Language of Spirit

Spiritual discourse on the forum occurs in multiple contexts and in a variety of ways. I cannot declare this type of register to be religious because it does not seem to address the presence of a God, heaven or hell. Instead, spiritual discourse is based on the idea that there is an ubiquitous presence of the spirits of nature. Forum members describe members of mainstream society as unable to see them and many times unaware of their existence. They live in a world made up of souls from all living things and, regardless of the specie, they are able to communicate with one another. Humans are left out of that world unless they place themselves in a position where they are able to transport their soul to the spirit realm. Ayahuasca is one way to do this; it bridges the divide between the human world and the supernatural world giving the drinker a sensory experience. Experiencing the supernatural world through ayahuasca changes the way people talk about the world around them and how they react to that world. Ordinary house plants become a physical representation of this world and nature takes on a whole new meaning in respect to having agency. Forum members use this knowledge to identify the spirit of ayahuasca as an animated mother of entheogen's or plant teacher. I argue that this is significant in that it further removes ayahuasca drinkers from recreational drug communities, and it also legitimizes the use of ayahuasca as a spiritual sacrament to be protected under the freedom of religion in the United States.

*MIKE - She is the sacred medicine, the spirit of the Amazon. The vine of souls, the ladder to heaven. The sacred, the stupendously sensual, the spiritually erotic, the sacred feminine. Goddess, Ayahuasca.*

*SAM - A while back someone remarked that they didn't know if plants had spirits. Plants don't **have** spirits, plants **are** spirits.*

*Think about when you are communicating with a Plant. How do you communicate with it? Through words, through sight, sound, smell, tapping Morse code on its stem? No, you communicate with it by a ... feeling, a sense, an intuition. This is how Plants communicate among themselves -- not with thoughts, but with the direct interplay of spiritual energies. Ripples interplaying with ripples, no boundaries.*

*Let us say we see a fellow human, hear, smell, and touch him. Then let us say that you get a sudden feeling, an understanding, of who he really is, deep inside. That direct contact tells you much more than the animal physical senses ever could. That is the kind of direct sense that plants have of you, and of the other life around them. And that direct sensing, unmediated by thoughts and concepts, is the language of spirit.*

*Ayahuasca, among other things, makes us much more sensitive to the language of Spirit. That makes us more like Plants, because we start being able to communicate like Plants, by directly sensing the spiritual energies around us and responding to them.*

*Most plants, though, are limited in their ability to interpret or understand human energies. Most plants have no more idea of what it is like to be a human than most*



*humans have about what it is like to be a plant. Ayahuasca, however, is a Plant with a unique sophisticated understanding of humans, and that is why she acts as a go-between and translator between the Plant world and the Human world.*

What was formally a world unknown to the drinker becomes a reality when they work with ayahuasca and it changes their entire perspective on the role we play as humans in relation to the plants and animals around us.

### **My Cousins Monkey**

On recreational drug forums the members have an awareness that their conversations are being read by government officials. Discussion of drugs in first person can potentially be used as evidence against an individual or against the forum in a court of law. Measures are taken to limit the liability of drug talk by using certain names and phrases to disassociate themselves from an illegal activity.

When I first inquired about forum language on ayahuasca.com, someone had written a response to my question about relating an entheogenic experience to a third person that didn't exist.

*WYATT - A web term I learned here was sock puppet. We had a few some cycles back.*

*Other more local terminology is "dreaming" -- which means whatever it means -- and the attribution of entheogenic experiences to one's cousin's monkey's pet catfish.*

My initial response was confusion and wariness. I had been the target for some jokes in past threads, as to be expected, and I thought that they were “messaging with the anthropologist” again (Forum, 1999-2010).

*RESEARCHER - Okay I have three responses to this quote:*

*First is...Huh!?!?*

*Second is...are you just messing with me again 🤔*

*Third is...can you draw a kinship diagram for me, complete with monkey and catfish?*

After actually receiving a diagram (as a joke) that was so complex I declared it unreadable, members of the forum stated that this type of language is common in recreational drug forums.

*WYATT - I don't know how to direct you to a post that would illustrate what I mean, but basically, for a while, that's how people would write about their experiences. Like, instead of saying, "I drank last night and was shown the ultimate truth of the universe," people would say, "My friend drank last night and was shown the ultimate truth of the universe," or "My cat...."*

*The idea was that the DEA was keeping an eye on this site, and could potentially bust people based on what they wrote, and people could thus be legally construed to have confessed to felonies, etc. So it was better not to write of one's experiences in the first person. At least, that's my recollection.*

*ADAM - They are actually being serious in this case.*

*On many boards that discuss entheogens (or more widely, drugs) people describe their experiences in a way that implies they weren't the ones who had the experience, usually in an absurd way:*

*"My pet hamster drank a tea of..."*

*"My monkey's cousin's pet snake..."*

*And then SWIM started...."*

*(SWIM stands for "someone who isn't me").*

*Sometimes such reports are actually kind of funny (the first few times you read them), but it gets old pretty fast, and the presumed legal protection such constructs confer is extremely questionable at best. Such writing is actively discouraged here.*

The last sentence in the response above puzzled me. I did not understand why the ayahuasca forum would be any different from others. They were talking about an illegal substance on the forum without the protection of third person language, but why? I sent a PM to a member and asked the question of why they choose not to use this language:

*-I think at one time on the board, everyone couched their stories in terms of "I had a dream..." or "A friend of mine..." But after the UDV and Santo Daime court cases, I think people are less afraid to say "I drank ayahuasca" even when they are not doing it in one of those churches. And the mods haven't been enforcing that rule. But discussions of, say, taking LSD or ecstasy, or doing ayahuasca*

*recreationally are discouraged.*

*Now that the churches have won the right to use ayahuasca, people are wondering how it's gonna [sic] shake out when some visiting South American shaman or small group of non-church-affiliated gringos go to court. Some feel emboldened that it's going to turn out in favor of shamans and lone practitioners. I think it's up in the air.*

*I think we all believe that those are genuine religious practices, and fall under the freedom of religion in the first amendment, but I think the case law tends to want to see an institution that looks more like a traditional church, than a guru from another country or a group of people just getting together.*

*RESEARCHER - How do you avoid talking about illegal activities?*

*-Me personally? I don't talk about them! I know there was a thread a while back that that something along the lines of "my best friends monkey, did this" and "S.W.I.M." but I don't really see much of that on this forum. To me it seems like it came about because of the SD and UDV victories, but other people might see it differently. (Personal communication, May 5, 2010)*

The Santo Daime and UDV victories gave the forum members a sense of freedom to talk about ayahuasca in the first person. Rather than adhering to the recreational drug forum discourse strategies as demonstrated above with the use of third person language, forum members admit to their use of ayahuasca as demonstrated below.

HAYDEN - *In my very first ayahuasca ceremonies, I had the experience that I got a lot of sympathetic and empathetic wisdom embodied in myself. Basically I had insights and revelations about people's behavior through experiences of pain and empathy...* [Emphasis added]

WILL - *While ayahuasca has changed my life in various dramatic ways, sometimes it's the little things that are so satisfying...* [Emphasis added]

The language that they choose to describe their relationship with ayahuasca aligns them with the spiritual use rather than the recreational. Although there is no precedent set in the law for the spiritual use of ayahuasca by an individual, the language on the forum can be seen as establishing the foundation for this future precedent

Additionally, spiritual discourse is combined with actions to completely remove the ayahuasca experience from that of the recreational user. As discussed above, a person who works with ayahuasca must discontinue any use of western medicines that are contraindicated with an MAOI. The preparation of the tea is infused with spiritual blessings, intentions, and respect. These actions are followed by a *dieta* (MayoClinic.com & Hall-Flavin), whereby the drinker prepares their body for the ceremony. *Dieta's* are associated with the traditional use of ayahuasca but have changed in context due to the introduction of new foods in the Amazon, as well as the introduction of tourists who consume a more contemporary diet. This is not to be confused with the food restrictions associated with an MAOI diet (Forum, 1999-2010).

The personal beliefs of the drinker can also cause the definition of *dieta* to vary.

In the questionnaire, I asked “*Do you adhere to a dieta before you work with ayahuasca? If so what does your dieta consist of?*”

*-Most important to me is sexual dieta. I used to keep food diets to varying degrees of strictness... I have found lately that this is not terribly important for the work I'm currently doing with ayahuasca, although she has indicated that cleaner food intake and no salt are both "helpful."* (Questionnaire answer)

*-No salt, no refined sugars, sexual abstinence, no recreational movies or music* (Questionnaire answer)

*-I usually fast the day of, eating only a light breakfast if anything.* (Questionnaire answer)

*-Food -- usually one day of soup made of organic chicken and carrots with no salt or spices. No sexual activity either and as much quiet as possible.* (Questionnaire answer)

*-Besides as much "quiet" and meditation as possible (I put "quiet" in parentheses since my partner and I are both Daime musicians and actually prepare by practicing the hymns) our food for a day before and after the ceremony consists of organic boiled chicken, carrots, and quinoa or rice, with no salt or spices* (Questionnaire answer)

The responses show that not only foods and spices are taken into consideration when cleansing the body in preparation for the medicine. Sexual abstinence is seen as respectful when working with the spirit. One interpretation of sexual abstinence is to pay respect to the spirit as if the drinker were in a monogamous relationship with her.

*MAURICE - For me [the dieta], is best explained by the widespread vegetalista metaphor that the medicine is like a demanding, jealous lover. Its relationship with the drinker has the same intensity and compellingness [sic] as that of two sexual lovers. Both of those events engage their participants at a fundamental, cellular level where there exists the potential for healing by reconfiguring our basic patterns of bodily manifestation. Each one demands total attendance. That, for me, is the point of the no-sex rule.*

Also removing themselves from any social interaction and cutting out radio, television and other forms of modern technology is usually seen as cleaning the mind of contemporary garbage in preparation for their communication with the spirits. Other spiritual actions include conditioning the mind to accept the taste of ayahuasca and seeing la purga as purification process rather than a side effect.

### **Contemporary Ailments and Indigenous Cures**

A common link for many people on the forum is the motivation for seeking an alternative form of healing. Contemporary ailments like depression, anxiety, addiction, ADD/ADHD, OCD among others, are the primary catalysts for trying ayahuasca. Finding

that ayahuasca provides a deeper healing for some rather than modern medicine is why many continue to work with it.

It has been explained to me that modern medicines, although they are able to help in some situations, they only treat the symptoms of the illness. Ayahuasca, on the other hand, treats the inner source. On the survey I asked “*In your experience, how does western medicinal practices compare with indigenous medicinal practices?*” Here are some of the answers:

*-I have much faith in indigenous medicine. It's more holistic and recognizes spirituality as an integral part of the healing process. Western medicine for the most part seeks to treat the symptoms and relies on maintenance drugs.*

(Questionnaire answer)

*-Western medicine seems to be very objective, and not wholistic [sic]. They worry about physical symptoms, and don't factor in the emotional or interpersonal life of the patient.* (Questionnaire answer)

*-There are places and circumstances for both. The classic example being; you don't go to a shaman to fix your broken arm. However it has been a long time since I've really engaged western medicine. I find western medicine, on the whole, to be narrow, and well, sterile. While indigenous medicine, shamanism, plant medicine, et al, to be wide, deep, holistic, connective and alive.* (Questionnaire answer)



The forum members reinforce the views of ayahuasca as a medicine, rather than a drug, in their language. They talk about their symptoms lessening after an ayahuasca ceremony and receiving long term “healing” from the “medicine.”

*MIKE - Before I met Madre Ayahuasca my life had very little meaning. I feel exceptionally blessed to have this sacred medicine in my life at this time. I feel even more blessed when I consider this is just the beginning of a lifelong friendship, an apprenticeship of spirit.*

*HAYDEN - I've never been diagnosed with anything other than depression, but for me, after ceremonies, I have a sense of tranquility or peace of mind. I don't feel like my mind is a small boat set upon by choppy waters. An inner steadiness or something like that.*

Discussions of healing on the forum have also compared the differences in approaches to ayahuasca as a medicine and the healing process, between mainstream society and indigenous/mestizo society.

The main difference between the two, as observed by members of the forum, is that indigenous/mestizo drinkers may drink only once or twice to get rid of the sickness. Their belief system incorporates the causality of illnesses to an external negative energy, called *brujeria* or witchcraft, which is being purposely shot into them with magical darts called *virote* 's. Being shot with a *virote* causes the illness or the inability to heal physical wounds and is often cast out of jealousy or hatred by a person's enemy. In this case, the job of ayahuasca is to reveal the person who is responsible for the negative energy and

reveal the invisible *virote*'s so the shaman can remove them. Once this healing act is performed the patient begins to feel better (Gorman, 2010).

*VICTOR - Try imagine a weather system that operates between people, or specifically between the relationships of people. The energys are mostly have's or have nots, wants, desires, jealousy, lusts ect ect yadda yadda yadda.[sic] Someone who wants something be it fame, attention, recognition, materiel items, money, women, love ect ect [sic]. Will have a depression (void) to fill (if they cannot detach themselves from the energy system (carefree) and these depressions or gains in energy of any level.. materiel, emotional, even imagination (all densitys of either) can move peoples thoughts or feelings. Its not really intentional, even if the brujo thinks they are being so, or the "victim" thinks so... its just the nature of energy [sic].*

*PATRICK - Brujeria exists in all cultures, I think, but isn't always recognized as such. Essentially, we're talking about someone putting a lot of negative intention into someone or something to cause something bad to happen. The virotes utilized by curanderos in the Amazon are one way of doing that. If they are being used as a warning, you might well feel them. If they are intended to cause real harm, you probably won't even notice them until the harm begins to happen. And then they've got to be removed. Finding them in yourself is difficult, I find. The thing with negativity is that it's got a life force just as strong as the most positive energy. The simplest example, I think, might involve plants. Your demeanor, if positive, can make your house plants grow wonderfully. Change*

*your energy and start putting off negative energy and watch those babies wither and die. Now imagine someone spending a great deal of time wishing you harm for some reason. They wish you so much harm that they pay someone who specialized in negative energy to do harm to you. That's a lot of negative energy coming your way, whether it's coming through Amazonian bruja or simply your next door neighbor. And it's going to have an effect on you.*

*In terms of medicine, I don't think only people who utilize ayahuasca are in the line of fire. As noted above, I think it can just be your neighbor hating on you with regular negative intent. But I do think that there is a culture of jealousy in Amazonia that makes it more frequent. That, coupled with people recognized as brujos/brujas--hired gun negative sorcerers--as a regular part of the culture, is a potent mix.*

Another cause of illness is the loss of a soul. Indigenous groups that practice animism believe that the soul exits the body when they are sleeping and wanders around the supernatural world (Pratt & Gale Group., 2007). A person becomes sick when the soul doesn't return, it is either being held by bad spirits or has gotten lost (Pratt & Gale Group., 2007). The shaman will drink ayahuasca in order to enter the supernatural world and find the lost soul. If he fails at his job the patient might die.

*ELLIS - When an indigenous or mestizo person goes to a ceremony, they usually have a very clearly defined ailment in mind that they want to heal. It is usually a problem that has physical manifestation (e.g. pain or malfunction of a bodily organ) or non-physical manifestation such as sadness, lack of energy, bad luck,*

*inability to attract women, etc. They just want to get rid of whatever is causing the problem and go away (and hopefully never have to drink Ayahuasca again).*

In either of these healing methods, the drinkers of ayahuasca or the patients themselves do not continuously take ayahuasca as we take medicine in Western mainstream society. Indigenous use of ayahuasca differs.

*ELLIS - Westerners, however, usually don't come with clearly defined problems or even consider themselves sick. They emphasize that healing is a path, not a goal. The top reasons they mention for drinking Ayahuasca are:*

*"I want to be enlightened"*

*"I want to have a spiritual awakening"*

*"I want to see the world differently"*

*"I want to act less on my ego and more out of my true being"*

*"I want to be a better person"*

*etc.*

Not everyone agreed with the statement that westerners think of ayahuasca as a long term healing path.

*JEREMY - Where did you get these "top reasons"? What's your point of reference?*

*I've drank with about 200 different European people over the last four years and I can only think of one, perhaps two of them, who could relate to what you've mentioned in terms of intent.*

*99% of them came for a specific purpose, with a specific intent, to require help on a specific level. Sometimes physical, I've seen people with addictions to drugs or alcohol, back pain, broken leg, sweaty hands, loss of weight, eating disorder, cancer, hearing problems... sometimes psychological, childhood traumas, to work on self confidence, self esteem, fears, depression, violent or suicidal thoughts... to work on relationships, family, lovers... or because they are stuck in a situation in their life they can't get out from or want clarity about, job, celibacy...*

*Unless they need more help or are willing to become helpers themselves and receive teachings, most are very happy not having to come back.*

*MAX - About 97% of what I've heard about the whole "ayahuasca spirituality" thing has been online on message boards. The other 3% was from some of the visitors from North America and Europe in our discussions before ceremonies. I've never heard it from L. or the locals who were born and raised in the ayahuasca and plant medicine culture.*

Much of what modern medicine has become are preventative measures or maintenance of illnesses through a daily dose of prescription medication. Contemporary ayahuasca drinkers use a combination of modern medicinal practices by routinely working with ayahuasca and also contemporary indigenous practices by working with ayahuasca ritually when needed.

### **Medicinal Discourse, Religion and United States Law**

As mentioned above in the section under Ayahuasca and the Law, a Colombian ayahuascero, named Taita Juan Bautista Agreda Chindoy, was recently arrested at the

Houston International Airport and charged with possession of an illegal substance. He had brought 30 liters of ayahuasca with him to perform an ayahuasca ceremony in Oregon at the request of a non-profit organization “dedicated to the revitalization of traditional knowledge and indigenous cultures that recognize the interdependence of human and environmental health” (EcoEra.org, 2008). The forum’s response to his arrest was overwhelming. The discussion of how to bring this to public attention and to make sure that Taita Juan received the best legal team through donations and support formed the core messages.

*RYAN - I am far from a lawyer, but it seems like his students, with enough money, could do a class action on a first amendment basis. Eventually someone in the non-daime world needs to do that.*

*SCOTT - The website says: [the website created for donations to the cause] "Due to the outpouring of support, we have developed the strongest legal team possible to effectively defend Taita Juan's rights."*

*Does anyone know anything about this legal team?*

*The contact telephone number on the site is that of an outfit named Eco Era in Sebastopol, California 95472, who list themselves under the category "Environmental Engineers, Environmental Consultants & Products." Their website is at <http://www.ecoera.org/>. They appear to run nature tours in Costa Rica and to focus on "the application and research of traditional ayurveda and traditional amazonian medicine."*

*I can guess that this might well be the outfit that was sponsoring taita Juan. Were*

*they unaware of the risks he ran bringing yage [another name for ayahuasca] into the United States? Does anyone have any information about them?*

This was followed by discussion on the implication of his arrest and the future of law and ayahuasca. Naturally, language was discussed in relation to characterizing Taita Juan as a “healer” and ayahuasca as a “medicine.” The possible difficulties in establishing ayahuasca as a religious sacrament with the language surrounding this story became a concern.

*RYAN - I would say that their carelessness in having him cross the borders with medicine is not at all dissimilar to many others who have done so. There has been a strong feeling in the community, given the lack of any apparent interest by the government, of a degree of safety. Sadly this seems to now be at an end unless something like a class action suit under first amendment freedom of religion rights is undertaken by the rather disorganized and non-united shamanic community. I'm hoping that this could be the spark that fans that flame and that someday the use of this sacred medicine by those following a tradition millennia older than UDV or SD will no longer be illegal.*

*ADAM - I know that in some cultures (cultures that some would argue are more sane), the line between healing/medicine and spirituality/religion is blurry, if not non-existent. But this is not the case in the US. I don't know how someone like the Taita could mount a freedom of religion case when he makes no claims to religion. If you look at the (brief) posts that Scott referenced above, he is called a healer, ayahuasca a medicine, etc.*

*One could argue that these distinctions shouldn't be made in this way, and it would be an interesting discussion. But that is the current situation, so I see no way such a defense could be mounted within the US legal framework. Maybe some clever lawyer could figure out a way, but I don't see it.*

*SCOTT - Remember that if health claims are made for ayahuasca, then it falls under the jurisdiction of the FDA, and it becomes a misbranded drug.*

*DOUG - Maybe this is a side effect of an evolution, noted by anthropologists, among Amazonian indigenous shamans to present themselves as healers and their activity as semantically related to the "medical". This in response both to 1) administrative pressure (it was certainly the easiest way to find a common ground with civil servants who came to assess and categorize their activity, and bring them an official identity), and 2) the demands of many Westerners, who want to be 'healed'. A cultural co-evolution.*

*In this particular case, the cultural co-adaptation may unfortunately be more a disadvantage than an asset...*

*RYAN - Just a note on the term "medicine" in relationship to Aya. Many North American natives I have met use the term for much beyond what is considered medicine. A necklace can be medicine, a feather, a song, etc. So there is already precedent for the use of the term as a spiritual reference above and beyond that of a euro-centric doctor patient thing.*



The arrest of Taita Juan and the subsequent discussion surrounding his arrest emphasizes the ambiguity between what constitutes religion and medicine. Many forum members are intrigued to see if this case will be a precedent in United States law, where the acknowledgement of individual religious freedoms will be considered. What does that mean for members of the ayahuasca.com forums? The majority of members on the forum practice the solitary use of ayahuasca in their home country where their spirituality and sacrament/medicine is a legal grey area. During my research I felt like there was a palpable anxiety about the next step in legal battles involving ayahuasca. Will this be the case that begins the battle? Probably not, but the discourse surrounding it is a fascinating combination of semantics and globalization.

## **Discussion**

For the members of the ayahuasca.com forums, language provides a way to separate their community from the stigma of the recreational drug sub-cultures that also communicate through online forums. From the moment a new member joins the forum their online identity is shaped; first by the rules of the forum in the information index and then by noticing and adhering to the language preferences of the other members. There is a constant awareness that the moderators and members may police the language or question a member's true motives for trying ayahuasca. For the most part, people have found their way to the ayahuasca forums because of the alternative form of discussing ayahuasca as an entheogen with a greater purpose.

My interpretation is that members of the forum are disenchanted with modern medicine and have chosen alternative methods for healing their illnesses or mental health problems. In doing so they are sensitive to the stigma of recreational drug use and its affiliation with psychedelic drugs. In order to combat this image in mainstream society they have re-contextualized the psychedelic substance, ayahuasca, into an entheogen used for medicinal and spiritual purposes. Since indigenous and mestizo communities culturally interpret ayahuasca as a medicine with an animistic mother spirit, mainstream ayahuasca drinkers are able to appropriate the established lexicon for their use on the forum.

Spiritual discourse also has another function. By applying spirituality to the experience and backing it up with centuries of indigenous ceremonial use, I see their discourse as laying the foundation for the legal use of ayahuasca in mainstream society. Reinforced by the 2006 and 2009 Supreme Court victories, solitary ayahuasca drinkers have gone to great lengths to establish a record of the spiritual use of ayahuasca through the forum.

The acceptance of ayahuasca as something different and special to be used as a spiritual guide and healing medicine can also have an effect on the views of mainstream society. In one online discussion I asked several questions on the topic of relating their experiences to the “outside world”:

*RESEARCHER - What do your friends, family and coworkers think of your involvement with indigenous medicine? How do you explain the illegal aspect of aya to them?*

*Have you shared your journey's with people (other than people you know) outside this community, that haven't participated, nor wish to participate in an ayahuasca ceremony?*

*What are some reactions that you have received?*

*MARLEY - I have one friend who doesn't do any sort of drugs, and never has. He is generally open about things, however, and has been listening to me when I tell him that aya is not a recreational drug but a healing medicine that does not poison the body or confuse you like hallucinogens can. He is clear that I am taking it for spiritual growth. I don't think he'll ever try it (but who knows, maybe he will someday) because of his personal biases, but he accepts my communion with aya and seems more comfortable with it than he used to be.*

*ADAM - To answer your questions directly, only a handful of people "in real life" know that I drink ayahuasca, and the response I have gotten from them has been very positive, mainly because I only discuss it with people for whom the discussion makes sense. If people would be open to the discussion I discuss it with them, otherwise not. Family is a yes and no. My wife knows of course--you can't hide something like this from your spouse--and while she doesn't understand it she is supportive of it. I've discussed it with my sister, but she lives in xxxxx and has friends and acquaintances who are Diamestas, so these are easy, straight-forward discussions (and she's a Pagan anyway). My mother is an elderly and devote Catholic from the Midwest, so it would not make sense to discuss it with her.*

*ELLIS - I told my mom about my use of Ayahuasca and Iboga and have given her Ayahuasca twice, at carefully chosen, gentle yet visionary doses.*

*I think she's a bit more open now as far as these things are concerned, and maybe some other things as well, but there is still a lot to be healed. The topic hasn't come up in our conversations in a long time and I'm not planning on pushing her in that direction for the time being, but I might bring it up in the future.*

*It's amazing what misinformation and prejudice people are filled with. Even in my early 20's, she would say "Don't even try cannabis. It's a dangerous drug that kills people" or something to that effect. But she was much more open and curious about Ayahuasca, as she'd never heard of it before.*

When discussing my ayahuasca research with family and friends over the course of several months, I was astonished to find out that only two people had heard of ayahuasca. At first I used the terms associated with recreational drug use to explain my project, for example, “ayahuasca is a hallucinogenic drug taken for spiritual purposes...” or “ayahuasca is a psychedelic tea made out of plants...” I realized that the moment I said those words the facial expression of the person I was discussing it with would turn to fear and concern. However, after spending time on the forum I began to use their terminology when discussing ayahuasca and I noticed a change in the reactions of the people I discussed it with; “ayahuasca is an indigenous visionary medicine...” and “ayahuasca is an entheogenic tea made out of Amazonian plants...” seemed to get a more curious response that deepened and lengthened the conversations.

Spiritual and medicinal discourse seemed to open up the minds of mainstream society when discussing an illicit and mysterious substance. The exotic origins of ayahuasca and its relative obscurity among mainstream society has given ayahuasca drinkers a blank slate to build terminology and discussion using the words that they have determined pays respect to the sub-cultural practices of ayahuasca.

## **Conclusion**

Sending out your soul on a forum is safe and risky, frustrating and addicting, and a way of escaping human contact but remaining sociable at the same time. Forum members feel safe to express their feelings, get into arguments, discuss their problems and make friends based on common views and interests without the pressure of face to face confrontations that may lead to embarrassment and prejudices based on age, gender, race/ethnicity and religious affiliation. It is risky because once something is posted for the forum to see, it allows a multitude of others to view what was written as well. Frustrations can occur when interpretations of text are misunderstood, and without the ability to ease tensions with a wink and a smile tempers may flare. Becoming addicted to forum communication has its advantages and disadvantages. As it is, jobs today require less and less personal contact between people and more time on the computer. Having access to people throughout the day to whom a person can relate to can decrease feelings of isolation and increase feelings of inclusion. However, spending time with an imagined community can often take the place of a physical community and reinforce the fears associated with social and physical contact.

Media discourse in the past have been seen as one sided, where the messenger has the information and bestows it upon the receiver who is unable to express their views about the original message. Forum discourse, however, has placed another dimension to the linear model of media (Spitulnik, 1993) by allowing conversations to ebb and flow around the original message. This allows people to express a point of view, ideas to flow, and personality to emerge in written discourse. Eventually, a community of like-minded people with the same interests and ways of expressing those interests becomes apparent and, in return, helps to create an individual's identity. An online identity may differ from a real life identity but in some ways they are the same; while online a person has the freedom to express their views in the register of the forum, in real life, when they fall into the forum register, they know that they have a whole community backing them up in their efforts to express their interests.

## Glossary

**ADD/ADHD** – Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

**Ayahuascero/a** - a healer who works with ayahuasca.

**Blog**- Full name: weblog, a journal written on-line and accessible to users of the internet (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Brujeria** – witchcraft (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008; Gorman, 2010)

**Brujo/a** – a sorcerer who takes money or goods in exchange of performing witchcraft on someone's enemy with the intent to harm or kill (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008).

**Bump** - to bring up somebody's post typically by posting the word "bump" on a message board Can also stand for Bring Up My Post (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Chacruna** – (*Psychotria viridis*) a hallucinogenic admixture plant used in the creation of ayahuasca.

**Curandero/a** – Spanish term for traditional healer (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008).

**Dream** – is a name for the journey one takes when under the influence of ayahuasca.

**Drug** - a chemical substance used in the treatment, cure, prevention, or diagnosis of disease or used to otherwise enhance physical or mental well-being. A habit-forming medicinal or illicit substance, esp. a narcotic (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Entheogen** - Any substance, such as a plant or drug, taken to bring on a spiritual experience. Entheogen is supposed to be a kinder term than hallucinogen or psychedelic.

*Etymology:* lit. 'Generating the divine within' (Dictionary.com, 2010)

**Forum** - a meeting or assembly for the open discussion of subjects of public interest. A forum is a space where like minded individuals can contribute information of mutual benefit. A forum is a repository of data which is meant to inform and educate on a particular subject (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Flamer** - A person who constantly starts fights on forums or message boards; usually with many vulgar statements and outright lies (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Hallucination** - a sensory experience of something that does not exist outside the mind, caused by various physical and mental disorders, or by reaction to certain toxic substances, and usually manifested as visual or auditory images. A false notion, belief, or impression; illusion; delusion (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Icaro** – Healing song sung during ayahuasca ceremonies to invoke spirit forces for healing and protection (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008).

**Medicine** - any substance or substances used in treating disease or illness; medicament; remedy (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Mestizo** – a person with indigenous and European blood that participates in both indigenous and contemporary western culture.

**OCD** – Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

**Post** – The written statement, question or response by an individual on a forum or weblog.



**Psychedelic** - of or noting a mental state characterized by a profound sense of intensified sensory perception, sometimes accompanied by severe perceptual distortion and hallucinations and by extreme feelings of either euphoria or despair (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Psychoactive** - of or pertaining to a substance having a profound or significant effect on mental processes: a psychoactive drug (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Shacapa** - A bundle of leaves with a distinct musical rattling sound, used in combination with icaros.

**Shaman** - (esp. among certain tribal peoples) a person who acts as intermediary between the natural and supernatural worlds, using magic to cure illness, foretell the future, control spiritual forces, etc (Dictionary.com, 2010).

**Sock puppet** - An account made on an internet message board, by a person who already has an account, for the purpose of posting more-or-less anonymously (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Teacher plants** – plants that are used as entheogen's with the attribution of a knowledgeable spirit.

**Thread** - On a message board, the inside of a topic revealing all the messages (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Topic** - a sub-title on a message board (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010).

**Troll** - One who posts a deliberately provocative message to a newsgroup or message board with the intention of causing maximum disruption and argument (Urban-Dictionary, 1999-2010)

**Vegetalista/a** – A plant doctor (Dobkin de Rios & Rumrill, 2008) or someone who uses plants to heal.

**Vine, caapi** – The main plant component in ayahuasca (*Banisteriopsis caapi*).

**Virote** – A magical dart believed to penetrate an individual's body and cause illness and disease.

**Vision** - the act or power of sensing with the eyes; sight (Dictionary.com, 2010).

## References

- 4oDLifestyle (2005). Extreme Celebrity Detox. United Kingdom.
- Agha, A. (2005). Voice, Footing, Enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15(1), 38-59.
- Anderson, B. R (2006). *Imagined communities : reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. ed.). New York: Verso.
- Ayahuasca.com. (2010a). Ayahuasca.com » Santo Daime » Santo Daime overview, from <http://www.ayahuasca.com/spirit/syncretic-movements/santo-daime-syncretic-movements/santo-daime-overview/>
- Ayahuasca.com. (2010b). Ayahuasca.com/What indigenous groups traditionally use ayahuasca? from [www.ayahuasca.com](http://www.ayahuasca.com)
- Beyer, S. (2008). Ayahuasca in the Supreme Court | Singing to the Plants. Retrieved from <http://www.singingtotheplants.com/2008/01/ayahuasca-in-the-supreme-court/>
- Beyer, S. (2009). A Victory for Santo Daime | Singing to the Plants. Retrieved from <http://www.singingtotheplants.com/2009/03/a-victory-for-santo-daime/>
- Bluemorphotours.com. (2010). Blue Morpho Ayahuasca center, 2010, from <http://www.bluemorphotours.com/>
- Bullis, R. K. (2008). The "Vine of the Soul" vs. The Controlled Substances Act: Implications of the Hoasca Case. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 40(2), 193-199.
- Cameron, D. (2001). *Working with spoken discourse*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Caragol Wells, P. (2009). Explorer | Inside LSD | National Geographic Channel.

Cefluris. (2000). Santo Daime - A Doutrina da Floresta, 2010, from

<http://www.santodaime.org/>

DEA. (2007). *21 United States Code (USC) Controlled Substances Act* From the U.S.

*Code Online via GPO Access [www.gpoaccess.gov] [Laws in effect as of*

*January 3, 2007] [CITE 21USC812]. U.S Department of Justice, Drug*

Enforcement Administration, Office of Diversion Control Retrieved from

<http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/21cfr/21usc/812.htm>.

DEA. (2009). N,N-DIMETHYLTRYPTAMINE (DMT), 2010, from

[http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drugs\\_concern/dmt/dmt.htm](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/drugs_concern/dmt/dmt.htm)

DEA. (2010). *Title 21 Code of Federal Regulations - Section 1307.31*. U.S Department of

Justice, Drug Enforcement Administration, Office of Diversion Control Retrieved

from [http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/21cfr/cfr/1307/1307\\_31.htm](http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/21cfr/cfr/1307/1307_31.htm).

Dictionary.com. (2010). Dictionary.com Retrieved July 7, 2010, from

<http://dictionary.reference.com>

Dobkin de Rios, M. (1972). *The use of hallucinogenic substances in Peruvian Amazonian*

*folk healing*. Thesis (Ph D ), University of California, Riverside, 1972.

Dobkin de Rios, M., & Rumrill, R. G (2008). *A hallucinogenic tea, laced with*

*controversy : ayahuasca in the Amazon and the United States*. Westport, Conn.:

Praeger.

Duranti, A. (2001). *Key terms in language and culture*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

EcoEra.org. (2008). Eco Era, from <http://www.ecoera.org/>

Forum. (1999-2010). Ayahuasca Forums :: Index, from

<http://forums.ayahuasca.com/phpbb/index.php>

- Furst, P. T. (1976). *Hallucinogens and culture*. San Francisco: Chandler & Sharp.
- Genep, A. v. (1966). *The Rites of Passage (translated version 4)*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Gorman, P. (2010). *Ayahuasca in my Blood: 25 Years of Ayahuasca Dreaming* (First Edition ed.): Createspace.
- Greenfield, R. (2006). *Timothy Leary : a biography* (1st ed.). Orlando: Harcourt, Inc.
- Grob, C. S. (2002). *Hallucinogens : a reader*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.
- Guerra, F. (1971). *The pre-Columbian mind: a study into the aberrant nature of sexual drives, drugs affecting behaviour and the attitude towards life and death, with a survey of psychotherapy in pre-Columbian America*. New York,: Seminar Press Ltd.
- Harding, S. F. (2000). *The book of Jerry Falwell : fundamentalist language and politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE.
- Holt, R. (2004). *Dialogue on the Internet : language, civic identity, and computer-mediated communication*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger.
- Karaganis, J. E., Bowker, G. C., Crane, G., Sundaram, R., Larkin, B., Ito, M., Gillespie, T. (2008). *Structures of participation in digital culture*: Columbia University Press.
- Lee, M. A., & Shlain, B. (1992). *Acid dreams : the complete social history of LSD : the CIA, the sixties, and beyond*. New York: Grove.
- Luna, L. E., & Amaringo, P. (1999). *Ayahuasca visions : the religious iconography of a Peruvian shaman*. Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books.

- MAPS. (2010). MAPS: Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies, from <http://www.maps.org/>
- MayoClinic.com. (2008). Monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs) - MayoClinic.com, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/maois/MH00072>
- MayoClinic.com. (2009). Serotonin syndrome - MayoClinic.com, 2010, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/serotonin-syndrome/DS00860>
- MayoClinic.com, & Hall-Flavin, D. K. (2010). MAOI and Tyramine Diet, 2010, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/search/search>
- Metzner, R., & Callaway, J. C. (1999). *Ayahuasca : human, consciousness, and the spirit of nature*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- Otis, J. (2009). Drug Tourism: Down the Amazon in Search of Ayahuasca - TIME. *Down the Amazon in Search of Ayahuasca*. Retrieved from <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1889631,00.html>
- Pratt, C., & Gale Group. (2007). An encyclopedia of shamanism. *Gale Virtual Reference Library*. Retrieved from [http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7C9781404211285&v=2.1&u=uarizona\\_main&it=aboutBook&p=GVRL&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7C9781404211285&v=2.1&u=uarizona_main&it=aboutBook&p=GVRL&sw=w)
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone : the collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rees, A. (2004). LSD, Francis Crick, and the secret of life, from <http://www.hallucinogens.com/lsd/francis-crick.html>
- Rheingold, H. (1994). *The virtual community : homesteading on the electronic frontier*. New York, NY: HarperPerennial.

- Salak, K. (2004). The New York Times > Travel > Sophisticated Traveler > The Vision Seekers. *The Vision Seekers*. Retrieved from [http://travel2.nytimes.com/2004/09/12/travel/sophisticated/12ST-PERU.html?\\_r=1&ex=1149739200&en=3957f84bb262c358&ei=5070](http://travel2.nytimes.com/2004/09/12/travel/sophisticated/12ST-PERU.html?_r=1&ex=1149739200&en=3957f84bb262c358&ei=5070)
- Schultes, R., & Raffauf, R. F. (1992). *Vine of the Soul: Medicine Men, their Plants and Rituals in the Colombian Amazonia*. Oracle, Arizona: Synergetic Press, Inc.
- Schultes, R. E., & Hofmann, A. (1979). *Plants of the Gods : origins of hallucinogenic use*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Schultes, R. E., & Raffauf, R. F. (1990). *The healing forest : medicinal and toxic plants of the northwest Amazonia*. Portland, Or.: Dioscorides Press.
- Seeger, S. C. (1997). Restoring rights to rites: The religious motivation test and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. *Michigan Law Review*, 95(5), 1472.
- Servindi. (2010). Colombian Indigenous Healer Arrested for Transporting Ayahuasca, 2010, from <http://www.servindi.org>
- Shanon, B. (2002). *The antipodes of the mind : charting the phenomenology of the Ayahuasca experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Spitulnik, D. (1993). Anthropology and the Mass Media. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22(1), 293-315.
- Strange, P. (2000-2010). The Discovery of LSD - The Naked Scientists 2009.04.16, 2010, from <http://www.thenakedscientists.com/HTML/articles/article/turn-on-tune-in-drop-out/>
- Stuart, R. (2002). Ayahuasca Tourism: A cautionary tale. *Multidisciplinary Association of Psychedelic Studies*, xii(2), 36-38.

- Taussig, M. T. (1986). *Shamanism, colonialism, and the wild man : a study in terror and healing*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tavares, R. B. C. (2007). The Juramidam Family - Santo Daime - Mestre Irineu, from [http://www.afamiliajuramidam.org/english/mestre\\_irineu\\_english.htm](http://www.afamiliajuramidam.org/english/mestre_irineu_english.htm)
- Torres, C. M., Repke, D. B., Chan, K., McKenna, D., Llagostera, A., & Schultes, R. E. (1991). Snuff Powders from Pre-Hispanic San Pedro de Atacama: Chemical and Contextual Analysis. *Current Anthropology*, 32(5), 640-649.
- Turner, V. W. (1969). *The ritual process: structure and anti-structure*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
- UDV. (2010). UDV - Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal - A União do Vegetal e a missão, 2010, from <http://www.udv.org.br/A+Uniao+do+Vegetal+e+a+missaobrespiritual+do+Mestre+Gabriel/Destaque/12/>
- Udv.org.br. (2010). UDV - Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal - A União do Vegetal e a missão, 2010, from <http://www.udv.org.br/A+Uniao+do+Vegetal+e+a+missaobrespiritual+do+Mestre+Gabriel/Destaque/12/>
- UNODC. (2010a). *Convention on Psychotropic Substances*. United Nations Retrieved from <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/psychotropics.html?ref=menuaside>.
- UNODC. (2010b). *Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs*. United Nations Retrieved from <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/single-convention.html>.
- Urban-Dictionary. (1999-2010). [www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com). Retrieved from [www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term)



- Villavicencio, M. (1858). *Geografia de la Republica del Ecuador*. New York: R. Craigshead.
- Wallis, R. J. (2003). *Shamans/neo-Shamans : ecstasy, alternative archaeologies and contemporary pagans*. New York: Routledge.
- Wenger, E., McDermott, R. A., & Snyder, W. (2002). *Cultivating communities of practice : a guide to managing knowledge*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wernitznig, D. (2003). *Going native or going naive? : white shamanism and the neo-noble savage*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Wood, A. F., & Smith, M. J. (2001). *Online communication : linking technology, identity, and culture*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

## Appendix – Questionnaire

### DEMOGRAPHICS

The information you supply in the demographic section will only be viewed by the student researcher and never revealed in connection with your username. Not even under torture.

1. Ayahuasca forum username
2. Your age
3. Country/State of residence
4. Occupation
5. Religious affiliation
6. Race/ethnicity
7. Gender

### IDENTITY

This is a chance to show me, the student researcher, who you are and how you have formed an identity on the forum.

8. How often do you work with ayahuasca?
9. What does your username mean?
10. Please choose which description suits you the best:
  - Solitary drinker - someone who drinks mostly on their own
  - Ayahuasca retreat drinker - someone who drinks mostly in an indigenous setting (includes ayahuasca retreats and indigenous villages)
  - Syncretic church drinker - someone who drinks mostly in a Santo Daime or UDV environment
11. Do you adhere to a dieta before you work with ayahuasca? If so what does your dieta consist of?
12. What do your family and friends think of your use of ayahuasca?
13. What are some of your other interests, hobbies and activities?
14. Do you keep a journal of your experiences?

15. What are your views on the recreational use of ayahuasca?

16. What are your views on the illegal status of ayahuasca in some countries?

#### MOTIVATION

This group of questions will focus on your reasons for seeking indigenous cures for western ailments.

17. How did you first hear of ayahuasca?

Please choose only one of the following:

Internet

Books

Radio

Newspaper/magazine

Documentaries

Medical Doctor/Psychologist

Friend

Family member

Your own research

While traveling

Other

18. Why have you decided to work with ayahuasca?

19. Tell me about your *first* experience with ayahuasca.

What was the atmosphere like? What were you feeling before the ceremony? How did you prepare yourself? Anything and everything that you can remember!

20. Where was your first ayahuasca experience?

Please choose only one of the following:

At home, alone, without a sitter

At home, alone, with a sitter

In a group ceremony, in your country, without a shaman

In a group ceremony, in your country, with a shaman

At an ayahuasca retreat in South America

In a Santo Daime or UDV environment

Other

21. If your first experience was with an ayahuasca retreat in South America, in what country was your retreat?

22. How has ayahuasca helped or not helped?

Spiritually

Mentally

Physically

Emotionally

23. In your experience, how does western medicinal practices compare with indigenous medicinal practices?

#### COMMUNITY

This question group will ask your views regarding the forum, how you get along, how you don't and how you function as a community to bring the knowledge and experiences of ayahuasca to the world.

24. Why have you chosen to become a member of the ayahuasca.com forums?

25. What are the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a forum community?

26. What do you like and dislike about the ayahuasca forums?

27. What sets the ayahuasca.com forum apart from other entheogen related forums?